

Horror in Culture & Entertainment

RUE MORCUE

**7TH ANNIVERSARY
HALLOWEEN ISSUE**

**THE RETURN OF
CLIVE BARKER**
THE DEFINITIVE INTERVIEW

HISTORY OF CANADIAN
HORROR

FRIDAY THE 13TH
RETROSPECTIVE

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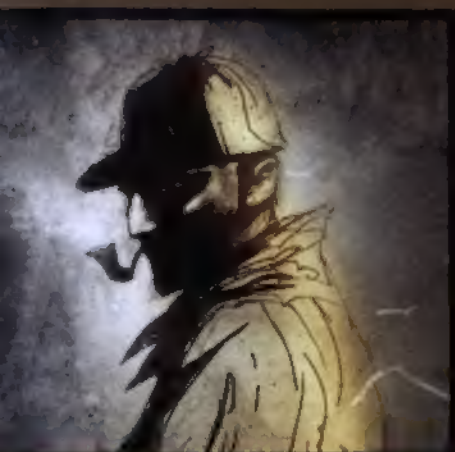
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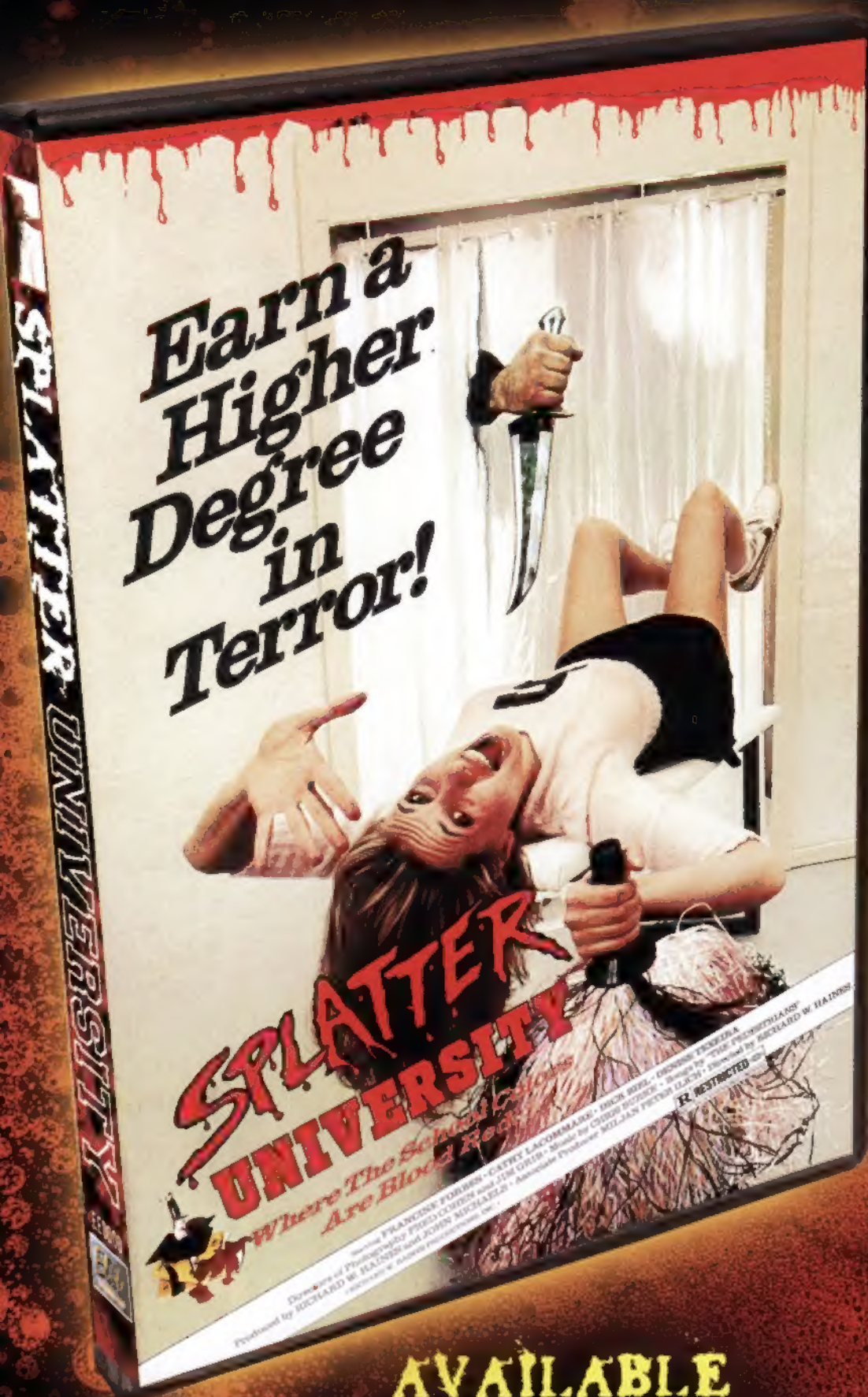
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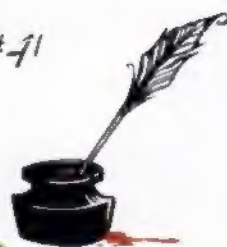
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Théodore Géricault's Raft of the Medusa.

September/October 2004, Halloween Issue #41

Note From Underground



It's late in the production cycle as I sit down to write this; an exhausting schedule that has kept me and the staff working furiously into the night for days on end, trying to bring together the 140 pages of *Rue Morgue's* 7th Anniversary Halloween issue in as perfect shape as possible. And as I sit writing these words, I'm overwhelmed by the thought that it's been seven whole years. I guess in some ways it's not that long but it sure *sounds* long to me.

It seems like it was only a little while ago that I was putting the magazine together without the aid of a proper staff, agonizing over the Halloween issue because it was always a time of hyper-activity. This year has been no different: *Rue Morgue* now has its very own convention, *The Festival of Fear*, along with a brand new website, an internet radio show, a record label, a stage show called *Nightmare Picture Theatre* and, of course, *Funeral Fiesta*, our upcoming 7th anniversary Halloween bash.

And even though I'm thrilled and ecstatic about it all, I have to admit, it seems like every Halloween the feeling of celebration is overwhelmed by the sheer amount of work that goes with it. It's been a long time since Halloween was just a late autumn day when the streets were overrun with giggling ghosts and horror movies blared out of every channel late into the night. Not that I'm complaining because, as you may have guessed, we at *Rue Morgue* get to enjoy Halloween throughout the entire calendar year... just not necessarily on Halloween night.

This year is also especially busy for what I have yet to announce, a major turning point for the magazine that will signify the ushering in of a new era in *Rue Morgue's* history. Don't worry, our commitment to remain utterly independent of the fluctuations and trend-chasing that plagues the entertainment industry – and the genre itself – will remain utterly intact; it is, after all, at the heart of what *Rue Morgue* is about. If anything, the magazine will be going deeper into its original mandate – to uncover and celebrate the less obvious parts of horror in culture and entertainment and to bring to light some of the less talked about aspects of the genre. But you'll have to wait for the details.

Nevertheless, seven years is an important milestone; *Rue Morgue* has grown out of being a magazine into what I always envisioned it as; a media company with its fingers in more than just publishing, but also in events and entertainment. Change has not been without its losses, however, and none have been more significant than the retirement of the magazine's original Lady of *Rue Morgue*, Mary-Beth Hollyer, who was with me from the very first day, and who devoted her energy and expertise to making the magazine into what it has become over the past seven years (especially when it came to the use and misuse of hyphens). Mary-Beth leaves *Rue Morgue* to become a full-time mom, but remains here as a Board Member which means her spirit will continue to exert influence in some way. And while I'm at it, I should also point out how much the staff of *Rue Morgue* – Jen, Gary and Monica especially – work with tireless devotion and genuine love to make the magazine what it is; this issue is as much theirs as it is mine.

So there you have it. If you've read this far, it may have crossed your mind that this is a somewhat atypical Note From Underground from me, and you're right. Originally, I had written a 700-word dissertation on death and the soul and their relation to horror, but both me and the staff felt it was a tad too esoteric and depressing for our 7th anniversary Halloween issue. So you'll have to wait a few issues for that one. In the meantime, I hope you have a happy and safe Halloween and I hope to see you all at *Rue Morgue's* *Funeral Fiesta* on October 30 (see pg. 103 for the details).

RG

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Rue Morgue #41 is dedicated to: Christopher Bailes

COVER: RED DEATH WITH WINGS

BY CLIVE BARKER

Rue Morgue Magazine accepts no responsibility for unsolicited manuscripts, photos, art or other materials. Freelance submissions accompanied by S.A.S.E. will be seriously considered and, if necessary, returned.

RUE MORGUE Magazine #41

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Post Mortem

QUESTIONS • COMMENTS • CRITICISM

I AM yet another fan writing to slobber over the quality of your mag. I've been a horror junkie for over 40 years – since my mom took me to see *Psycho* when I was eight. You've introduced me to some great films I wouldn't have checked out had it not been for your reviews (*Ginger Snaps*, for example), but the gold rush came with your Best of 2003 issue and your praise for *Ju-On: The Grudge*. It's unquestionably the scariest movie I've seen in decades, all the more impressive for being so frightening with a minimal amount of violence, no sex (not that I mind either of them) and complete lack of the Western world's horror clichés. I've watched the others in the series and have found them also extremely creative and startling. How often can you say that about a sequel, let alone a handful of them? Your last issue's coverage of the movie was perfect.

Dave McElfresh – Tempe, Arizona

THIS IS in response to Rod's *Note*, you really struck me when you talked about all the books out there, and you had only two to talk about. I quickly ran through some of my faves for you and made a little list. So here it goes: *Tick Tock* by Dean Koontz, *The Tooth Fairy* by Graham Joyce, *Sonja Blue* by Nancy A. Collins and *The Traveling Vampire Show* by Richard Laymon. Hope this stirs your reading spark a little. I also wanted to tell you that I just love your page, probably the most of the whole magazine, and I love the magazine.

Jan Gillespie – address withheld

I'D LIKE to thank you first for reviewing *Frankenstein Must Be Destroyed* which, for my money, is the best movie Hammer made. But, more importantly, for your editorial in *RM#40*. It's so rare but so important to actually recognize literature as an art. On that note, I'd also like to thank you for making your magazine such an invaluable resource for aspiring horror writers. In the pursuit of promoting horror literature, perhaps a short fiction/poetry contest is in order?

Dominique Lamssies – Portland, Oregon

I JUST WANTED to drop a quick note and say how impressed I am with the latest issue of *Rue Morgue*. Not only with the quality of articles

where film is concerned, but also with what seems to be the magazines' growing emphasis on horror literature. It's great to see such notable names as Doug Clegg, Gary Braunbeck, Tim Lebbon, and Brian Keene reaching a wider audience of horror fans. Your heartfelt editorial also made quite an impression. Here's hoping you cover more in the world of horror lit as time goes by.

Tom Piccirilli – Loveland, Colorado

THANK YOU for supporting Bella Morte's current tour. Not only does Bella Morte make awesome music (which keeps getting better), they are also one of the nicest bands out there. I've been reading your magazine almost three years now, and you guys never stop surprising me with the quality of your product and the depth of your insight. Lastly, I'd like to personally thank Chris Alexander, not only for being one of your best and most amusing contributors, but also specifically for introducing me to the godlike maestro Mario Bava (since the Bava issue I've picked up the Troy Howarth book, and all of Bava's available DVDs). Cheers!

Jimmie Parker – Las Cruces, New Mexico

I JUST RECEIVED this month's copy of *Rue Morgue* and am enjoying it as I always do. Being an avid *Doctor Who* fan, I must point out an error in your reissues section. Jon Pertwee was the third *Doctor Who*, not the second. Keep up the good work!

Michael Proffitt – Arlington, Virginia

I CAN'T PRAISE your team enough for the quality of your magazine! I have never seen such intelligent and honest critiques of the horror genre. What a delight to find horror – so often treated as the ax-wielding "red-haired stepchild" – regarded with such respect and admiration. I find your magazine overall a revelation; informative, helpful, amusing, entertaining, twisted and wonderfully frightening, truly the stuff of which nightmares are made! I'm thrilled with each new issue that arrives in the mail and read them eagerly from cover to cover. I hope to continue to do so for a good long time to come!

Carrie L. Lannin – Alger, Michigan

IN *RM#39* you printed my nasty little letter, you know, the one where I blasted you guys for covering *Hellboy* and not promoting *Ginger Snaps: Unleashed* enough. I also said that *Rue Morgue* sold out just like that other horror magazine and that *Rue Morgue* is starting to lose its edge. Well guess what, after reading *RM#40*, I came to the conclusion that *Rue Morgue* has regained its edge. *RM#40* is easily the best issue ever. It blew my mind! You guys have certainly outdone yourselves and it's nice to have *Rue Morgue* back on track. Congratulations!

Mackenzie Fitzgerald – Bolton, Ontario

I AM WRITING to address the comments of Mr. Clayton George in the new issue (*RM#40*), even though I would absolutely defend *Rue Morgue* as the best genre magazine out there, and will be renewing my subscription for sure, I tend to agree with Mr. George ever so slightly. I think that one of the problems is that the magazine has become too extreme in the diversity of material it covers, either it is too mainstream (the *Hellboy* cover, one of the only *Rue Morgue* articles I could not finish reading) or too obscure (the large amount of space devoted recently to foreign and obscure horror that the average reader in Small-town, USA or Canada has little chance of actually seeing). Which brings us to the current issue, which I have only had opportunity to glance over as of this writing. With the simultaneous release of two editions of *Zombie* (Fulci) slated for July 27th, by both Shriek Show and Blue Underground, the upcoming August release of the much anticipated *Night of the Demons* DVD and the theatrical release of *Exorcist IV* just around the corner, I found the exclusion of any major features on any of these strange to say the least.

Eric Mehta – Montreal, Quebec

We encourage readers to send their comments via mail or e-mail. Letters may be edited for length and/or content. Please send to info@rue-morgue.com or:

POST MORTEM

c/o Rue Morgue Magazine

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Dreadlines

News Highlights



Horror Happenings

Guillermo del Toro to begin companion piece to *The Devil's Backbone*

Hot off the tails of his blockbuster hit *Hellboy* (RM#38), *Rue Morgue* favourite Guillermo del Toro is sparing no time getting back to his Latin roots with *The Pan's Labyrinth*, the upcoming Spanish-language bookend to his brilliant masterwork *The Devil's Backbone* (RM#24) set to lens this winter in Madrid, Spain. Co-produced by del Toro's company Tequila Gang (which has produced and co-produced eight Spanish-language movies including *The Devil's Backbone*) along with Anheló Producciones (who also co-produced *The Devil's Backbone*), *The Pan's Labyrinth* is a horrific fairy tale about a twelve-year-old girl with a crippled leg who falls in love with a satyr that lives in the centre of a rolling labyrinth, set against the backdrop of fascist Spain in 1943.

"*The Devil's Backbone* was a story with a ghost and [*Pan's*] is essentially a story with a fairy tale at its centre," del Toro told *Rue Morgue*. "And when I say a fairy tale, it's still me saying it," he adds laughing. "It's not a happy fairy tale; it's a very nasty, ambiguous bloody, brutal fairy tale, the way they used to be. This is Brothers Grimm before they cleaned them up."

Where *Backbone* was an allegory for the Spanish Civil War set in 1939, *Pan's* is an allegory for the fascist Spain of the 1940s, and takes place after the fall of the Republic. Thematically it functions as a companion piece to *Backbone* in that it does not follow the story from that movie, but only its major character – the war.

"This is post-war Spain," del Toro explains. "It's five years after *The Devil's Backbone*, in the supposed 'time of peace' in Spain after [right-wing nationalist General] Franco took over. It's fascist Spain repress-

ing the last insurgencies in the mountains."

Drawing inspiration from Argentine literary deity Jorge Luis Borges (whose fantastic dreamworlds are often preoccupied with labyrinths and the trappings of memory, prosperity and morality), del Toro employs Borges-like thematic concerns to explore a violent history that is extremely personal to him.

"This is the latest one that I'm doing that's a smaller scale, in Spanish, and very personal to me," he says. "It's probably the last one I'll do that deals with Spain, but I just felt that there were a lot of things pending on *The Devil's Backbone* in terms of 'the fantastic musings of a Mexican' about a war that I feel is very close to me, because many of my friends' families were exiled into Mexico because of that war."

Although he is considered a mainstream filmmaker with several blockbusters to his credit, del Toro's movies have become emblematic for their consolidation of the artistry of the classics with the modern horror film, giving his genre pictures a poetry and intelligence unlike anything else in the industry today.

"I've always been intrigued by characters that seem to live the world through a more fantastic view," del Toro muses, "be it the girl in *Cronos*, or the kids in *The Devil's Backbone* or the boy on the rooftop in *Hellboy* and so forth. This is essentially a girl that experiences – whether it's real or imaginary – an alternate fairy tale world of Spain in that period and how that relates to the real fascism and horrors that were going on at the time."

Like *The Devil's Backbone*, the look of the new film will also be highly "designed" in an attempt to emulate Victorian fairy tale



illustration in the setting of rural Spain through its textures and rich visuals. For the task, del Toro has brought together the same team from his earlier films; director of photography Guillermo Navarro (*Cronos*, *The Devil's Backbone*, *Hellboy*), comic book designer Carlos Giménez (storyboard artist for *The Devil's Backbone* and Pedro Almodóvar's Spanish drama *Talk To Her*), and William Stout (illustrator, *Return of the Living Dead*, *Invaders From Mars*, *Conan*).

"Although the setting is rural Spain, you will have all the idiosyncrasies that you would associate with that landscape," says the writer/director. "The house is certainly not a Victorian or an Edwardian mansion, but [the film] will definitely have a very classic feel to it."

Expect *The Pan's Labyrinth* to do the festival circuit in the summer of 2005 with a US theatrical release shortly thereafter. Look for more on the film and del Toro's upcoming adaptation of H.P. Lovecraft's *At the Mountains of Madness* in future issues of *Rue Morgue*.

Jen Vuckovic



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Garris to release first theatrical King adaptation in twelve years

Dreadlines

Mick Garris' *Riding the Bullet* is gearing up for a limited theatrical release in early October after making its world premiere at this year's FanTasia Film Festival. *Bullet* is the long-time Stephen King director's first feature film since 1992's *Sleepwalkers* (his successful television miniseries' *The Stand*, *The Shining*, and others notwithstanding). Based on the King horror novella published as an eBook in 2001, the modestly-budgeted independent movie stars Jonathan Jackson (*Insomnia*), David Arquette (*Scream*), Erika Christensen (*Swimfan*), Adam Battrick (*Andromeda*), Matt Frewer (*Dawn of the Dead* 2004), and Barbara Hershey (*The Stranger Beside Me*), and is best described as a ghost story in the classic sense; quiet and intimate.

"It is a horror film, but don't go in there expecting a lot of bloodshed," notes Garris during his stay in Toronto to oversee the film's sound mix. "There are KNB moments in the movie, but it's a quieter thing. It's a sentimental kind of horror movie," he adds with a laugh, "not about zombies or chain-saws."

Set on Halloween 1969, right after the "summer of love", *Riding the Bullet* involves troubled University of Maine art student Alan Parker (Jackson), whose work is obsessed with death and darkness. Fearing that his girlfriend (Christensen) is about to leave him, Alan becomes suicidal and his desperate, unsuccessful attempt to take his own life on his birthday opens a doorway for the Reaper to enter. While hitchhiking across Maine to visit his ailing mother (Hershey), he accepts a ride from a mysterious driver named George Staub (Arquette), and that's when Alan begins to learn the true meaning of death.

"The movie is about loss," explains Garris, who also drew from personal experience in drafting the screenplay. "That's the easiest way to put it. But it's about the loss of someone close to you, and it's about the loss of something that went on in society back in 1969, which is when I personally set the movie. And it's about embracing something while you have it, so that it will never be



Riding the Bullet: Garris adapts King with a "sentimental horror movie."

gone for you. It may sound silly, a ghost story that's very simple and straightforward, but I had gone through a lot of personal loss in the years previous and it just really resonated with me. Steve's story was set in the present, but there was something about it that kind of resonated in a personal way, that I felt I could say something about more than just personal loss."

Garris adds that this is the reason *Riding the Bullet* went the indie route; despite the considerable clout of King's name, no major studio would touch it because, unlike a *Dawn of the Dead* or *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, it was a horror film that couldn't be sold in less than a sentence.

"If it had been just a straight horror movie, it would have been a lot easier to sell," he admits. "We thought we were going to set it

up at a major studio right away because everybody responded really well to the script. But it's a very unconventional movie in that I tried to do with it what King does with his books, but the movies usually choose one side or the other. They either go horror movie or they go nostalgic, emotional drama. The books combine both of those elements and with this movie I wanted to tie those two sides together. I wanted it to be something more than a horror film, something that's fairly sentimental and very human in emotion; I think you can have both."

Visit *Riding the Bullet*'s official website at www.ridingthebulletmovie.com for info and updates.

Nathan Tyler



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—compiled by Monica S. Kuebler

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E-mail a link to: roadkill@rue-morgue.com

Filmax greenlights Nacho Cerda's ghostly feature debut

Spanish director Nacho Cerda is finally set to get behind the camera for his feature film debut. Cerda, whose short films *Awakenings*, *Aftermath* and *Genesis* – dubbed his “trilogy of death” – grabbed international attention for their extreme subject matter, hopes to begin shooting *Bloodline* this fall for Filmax's genre arm, Fantastic Factory (producers of Brian Yuzna's *Beyond Re-Animator*, Jaime Balguero's *Darkness*).

Cerda had been originally planning on making *Oblivion* (initially titled *Threshold of Dreams*), a “twisted religious thriller” about survivors in a post-apocalyptic world, as his debut film, but the 5 million Euro price tag meant that it had to be put on hold for a couple of years while he put the 2 million Euro *Bloodline* on the fast track.

Based on a story idea by Canadian screenwriter (and *Oblivion* co-writer) Karim Hussain and co-written by Hussain and Cerda, *Bloodline* is a “haunted house story but with a huge difference,” according to the director during a recent phone interview from his home in Barcelona.

The English-language film revolves around an American film producer named Marie who, after discovering she's adopted, sets off for Russia to find out who she really is. When her birth mother's dead body is found under bizarre circumstances, she travels to a remote part of the countryside and an abandoned farmhouse that she's inherited. An encounter with a mysterious man who may or may not be her brother is only the beginning, as she soon learns why the local villagers believe the house is damned.

“There are ghosts there, but not just any ghosts,” says Cerda with a laugh. “It's Marie's own ghost and that of this stranger – they are their own dead doppelgängers! It's really weird to think that she's being chased by her own ghost when she hasn't died yet but I think it sets up this terrific – and hopefully quite horrifying – cat-and-mouse game between the living and the dead, who are all the same people.”

But that's only part of the story: “As they

stay there at the house they find that time begins to change, to go in reverse,” adds Cerda, “and things that have already happened, bits of their history, start to be relived right in front of them.”

A final draft of *Bloodline* is currently in the hands of the studio and the casting process is underway while Cerda begins scouting locations. And even though much of the film is set in Russia, the director says he plans to shoot most of the interiors in Barcelona and the exteriors in northern Spain, where it's “more raw and less sunny.” Nevertheless, he fully expects the finished movie to retain the full impact of the story's setting.

“Russia is such an important part of the feel of the movie,” notes Cerda. “Russia rarely gets used in movies, particularly horror movies, and I think that setting lends the story a culture shock for both the main character and for the audience, to be alienated from what you know coming from a Western culture; it's like coming to the complete opposite. It's so big, so vast and unknown, that level of unfamiliarity – of believing anything can happen – inspires fear. To set it in Europe wouldn't have been as effective; it's much more familiar and friendly. And I know that Karim was really inspired by [Russian filmmaker Andrei] Tarkovsky when he came up with the idea for the story.”

Cerda also says he envisions the final film to be a “journey into the darkest depths of who you are,” and promises it will be – much like his short films – “shot in a way to make people very uncomfortable.”

“I want it to feel very primal, like a roller coaster,” he says. “It should deliver not just on the visual horror level, but also in terms of tension, the cerebral side that often gets overlooked or ignored in favour of blood and gore. Ultimately, I want to take the audience by the balls and just kill them.”

Barrett Hooper



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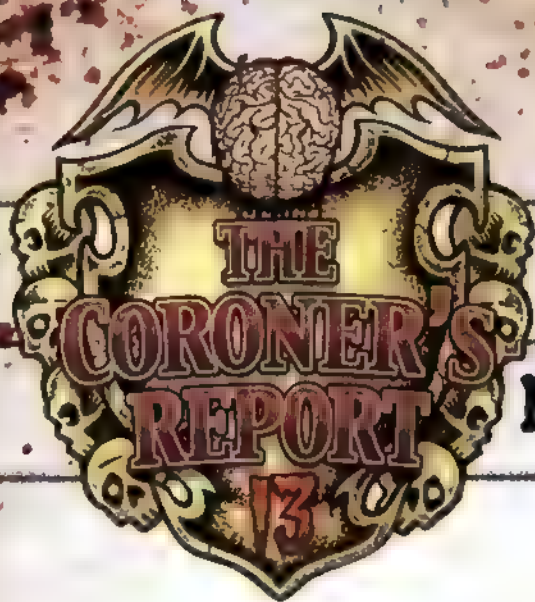
My name is Alice
and I remember everything.



IN THEATRES
SEPTEMBER 10

PG-13

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Weird Stats Morbid Facts

+ In 1991, the New York Supreme Court ruled that it is illegal to sell a haunted house without first informing the prospective buyer.

+ Ancient lore dictated that a spider rolled in butter and swallowed would cure both leprosy and the plague.

+ Vampire bats are known to support members of their colony by regurgitating blood to feed their fellow bats when food is scarce.

+ Halloween is traditionally seen as a time of divination. One superstition suggests that if a young woman places an egg in front of the fire and it sweats blood, she will succeed in capturing the man she loves.

+ In France, between the years of 1520 and 1630, over 30,000 people were brought to court and tried on suspicion of being werewolves.

+ Despite the widespread urban myth, very few incidents of Halloween candy poisoning have ever been cited. Most have been determined to be deaths from other causes including a case in 1970 where a boy was not poisoned by candy but rather, from eating his uncle's stash of heroin and another in 1974 where a father poisoned his son intentionally and used the candy excuse as a cover-up.

+ When Church of Satan founder Anton LaVey died at the age 67, his death certificate proclaimed his day of death as Oct. 31st, 1997. However, an official investigation conducted by the City of San Francisco uncovered that the date had been illegally written on the document.

+ On November 1st, 1952, when the first hydrogen bomb was detonated on the Marshall Islands, the entire island of Elugelap was obliterated.

+ In 1966, the Ouija Board business was sold to game manufacturers Parker Brothers and production was moved to Salem, Massachusetts. That same year, the Ouija Board outsold Monopoly, over two million of the wicked boards shipped.

+ None of the witches sentenced to death during the Salem Witch trials were burned at the stake. In fact, all but one were hanged. Giles Cory was pressed to death. Burning was a European practice.

+ A Greek superstition warns that if a cat jumps over a dead body before burial, the corpse will be resurrected as a vampire (a.k.a. vrykolakas). The antidote? Kill the cat.

+ In Scottish folklore, a goblin named Samhanach comes out only once a year on Samhain to steal children.

+ The Jack O'Lantern has its origins in Britain and Ireland. In the folk tale, Jack was a blacksmith who was deemed too evil for heaven but also succeeded in outwitting the Devil, making him equally unwelcome in hell. It is said that he wanders the earth with a lantern made of a coal and the last vegetable he was eating (a turnip). This later evolved into a pumpkin.

-compiled by Monica S. Kuebler
Got a weird stat or morbid fact?

Send it through to info@rue-morgue.com.

RUE MORGUE

The Rue Morgue SICK TOP SIX



Camp Crystal Lake KILLINGS



1. *Friday the 13th Part VII: The New Blood*
Sleeping bag tree thrashing
2. *Friday the 13th Part VI: Jason Lives*
Human lawn chair spine snap
3. *Friday the 13th Part 3*
Handstand ball bifurcation
4. *Friday the 13th Part 2*
Coital couple kebob
5. *Friday the 13th Part 2*
Wheelchair head hack staircase ballet
6. *Friday the 13th: The Final Chapter*
Jason's machete eye slide



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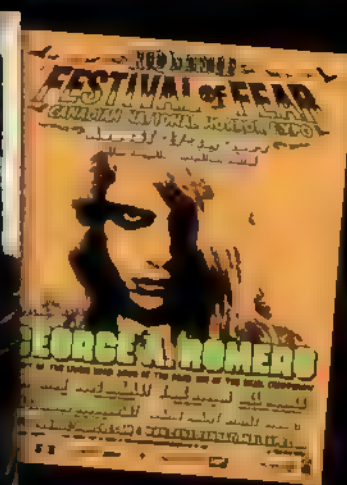
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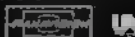
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For many, **CLIVE BARKER** left the genre sometime back in 1995, after having become a powerhouse horror institution. What they don't know is that he never really left. This year, **BARKER** prepares to bring the **BOOKS OF BLOOD** to celluloid on the 20th anniversary of those infamous works, and that's just the beginning....

The Unholy Rebirth of Clive Barker

by Jen Vuckovic • Illustrations by Clive Barker

You know his name, you know his movies, and you damn well better know his books. Twenty years ago, Clive Barker redefined horror literature with his infamous **Books of Blood**, a genre-shattering, breakthrough collection of abbreviated nightmares in print. His fantastic tales were a masterful blend of extreme horror and poetry of the perverso, comparable to the best of Poe and de Sade.

His six controversial anthologies, of course, were a huge success and led Barker to a rightful seizure of horror's cinematic throne just three years later with **Hellraiser**—the highly influential, flesh-wrecking slice of sadistic cinema and unholy nativity of Pinhead, one of the genre's most intriguing and enduring icons.

Nevertheless, over the last decade, Barker has been criticized by genre

fans for abandoning horror in both literature and cinema, his last directorial effort having been 1995's **Lord of Illusions**. But a closer look at his body of work reveals that, despite varying subject matter, he's never really left us at all. Now armed with a bloody bible of new material and grand designs, Clive Barker is poised to reinvigorate the genre in the way only he can.

Like the great William Blake, Barker is an artistic polymorph; whether it be painting, poetry, erotica or horror, his monolithic imagination has always addressed the strange, dark and unusual—right on through to **Abarat**, his new series of children's fiction. Whatever artistic discipline he expresses himself through, Barker always dives deep into the dark waters of his soul for inspiration, fearlessly exploring its boundless depths.

Clive Barker

BOOKS of BLOOD

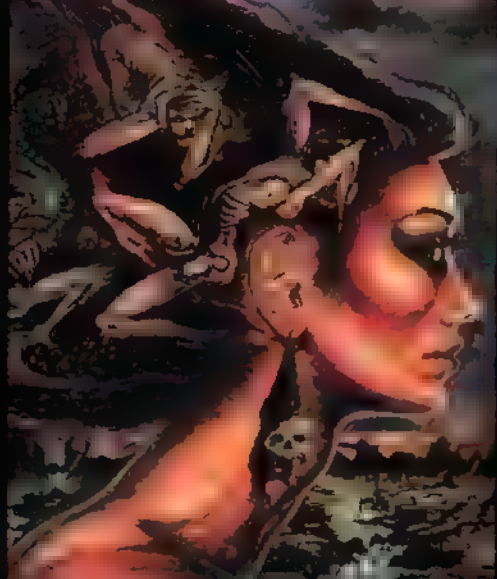
VOLUME ONE



Clive Barker

BOOKS of BLOOD

VOLUME TWO



Clive Barker

BOOKS of BLOOD

VOLUME THREE



This year, Barker comes full circle with his new film label Midnight Picture Show, a collaboration with Anthony DiBlasi and Joe Daley, the creative team behind Barker's Seraphim Films (*Saint Sinner*, *Lord of Illusions*). The new genre-specific, hard horror label plans to produce two films per year taken from the *Books of Blood* anthologies, with the purpose of creating an entire library of movies aptly-titled the *Films of Blood*.

Beginning this fall with *Midnight Meat Train* – the cannibalistic tale of subway train terror from the very first volume – MPS plans to follow up with a delicious assortment of *Blood* stories including *Pig Blood Blues*, *Age Of Desire*, *In The Flesh*, *The Madonna*, *The Life Of Death*, *Jacqueline Ess* and *Twilight At The Towers*.

In addition to producing the *Films of Blood*, Barker also plans to return to the director's chair next year with *Tortured Souls*, a new movie based on his McFarlane line of toys (*RM#40*). And if you've been turned off by the fantasy literature that the author has been pumping out over the last ten years, a new anthology of collected shorts and poetry – which includes a story that will spell the death of Pinhead – is the violent Viagra pill you've been waiting for.

Rue Morgue recently communed with Barker in a frank and intimate talk on everything from his struggle to get the *Books of Blood* published to his fear of dying. Sit down, eavesdrop, and get reacquainted with the modern renaissance man who continues to redefine the boundaries of horror, opening our minds to new possibilities within the genre and its limitless potential.

Good evening Clive. First of all, on behalf of the horror genre, welcome back. We missed you.

Thank you so much. I'm really excited to be back.

Throughout your literary metaphysical fantasy years and beyond, you've been criticized by horror fans for abandoning the genre, but now you're poised for an aggressive return to full-on horror. What's lured you back to the dark side?

It's both a negative and a positive impulse that got me here. Firstly, I've seen movies that I like that inspire me, that make me want to go back and look at the genre afresh. *28 Days Later*, *Ringu*, things like that. They'll be movies that you and your readers are familiar with, but very often they're not movies that are bang in the mainstream of Hollywood. Most of the horror movies, or any movies for that matter, that I've liked over the last few years have been things which have had their origins to the left or the right of the mainstream, like [Kátia Lund and Fernando Meirelles'] *City of God* for example. Have you seen it?

Oh yes. It's a truly brilliant and harrowing film.

I absolutely agree, it's an amazing and unsettling picture, and films like that have reinvigorated my interest in film. So that's the positive impulse; seeing movies and being excited about them all over again. The negative impulse is that I have felt that criticism you mentioned and have taken it very deeply that I have sort of abandoned the genre. I take that to heart. I don't know whether that's positive or negative but I listen to people and I know that *Hellraiser*, for instance, had some kind of effect upon the genre and some place in its progression and I'm very proud of that fact and I'd like to do it again. So it really comes out of a sense then, that though the dark stuff is still very present in the stuff I've been doing on the page, in the paintings and in the words for *Abarat* and in the novels too, those books tend not to be enjoyed by

"hard" horror fans. I think the real hardcore *Hellraiser* fans, for instance, probably wouldn't have a go at *Abarat*. You think that's true, right?

Yes, you are probably right but it's a shame, because there's some really disturbed stuff in there Clive! But it wasn't lost on all of us, your material has always been a broad spectrum of fantastic, you've really pushed the envelope within the genre over the years and opened people's minds about what "horror" is, and can be.

Thank you. You know, in fact, I would like to feel that one of the things I'd be doing in making another movie in the genre is even further broadening my own understanding of what the genre can do. Hopefully at the same time – as I talk about not only *Tortured Souls*, but all of my work – bringing more readers, picture viewers and movie viewers to what I do. What I do has always been a complicated thing Jen, as you know. Even way back in the *Books of Blood* days, there was a huge controversy between me and my agent, and me and my editor at what was then Sphere Books – who were the first people to publish the *Books of Blood* – over the publication of a story called *In the Hills, the Cities*. Both my agent and my editor strongly argued for its removal from the series.

Because of the homosexuality?

Yeah, absolutely.

But that's one of the reasons I was particularly drawn to your work, because it had massive balls.

In more ways than one! [laughing]

Touche! But really, you were destroying the boundaries of sexuality, horror, magic and all manner of taboo with a poetry the genre

**"I HAVE FELT THAT
CRITICISM.... AND
HAVE TAKEN IT
VERY DEEPLY THAT
I HAVE ABANDONED
THE GENRE."**

CLIVE BARKER



A young Barker on the set of Nightbreed (1990).

hadn't seen since perhaps Poe. It wouldn't be right to censor you. What did you do?

Well, they were terrified of all those things, particularly in that story, so I said: "if you remove the story, I won't publish these books with you," which was a fairly ballsy thing to say because at that point I hadn't had anything published. So it was really a bit of a bluff, you know? But they seemed to understand that I wasn't scared of what the consequences were. The consequences were that a lot of people would say "this guy's gay," and the answer from me was: yeah — what's the big deal? I think it's probably true to say that there weren't any "out" horror writers at the time in 1984. There had certainly been horror writers who had been outed after their death. Horror fans either don't ask the questions or don't care to ask the questions. What I've discovered since I wrote the *Books of Blood*, and since I've been on panels at conventions, and conversed with my readership through letters is exactly what you said; that people were waiting for somebody to push the limits of sexuality and the boundaries of the physical in horror fiction, short or long. And I had the very good fortune of coming along at the right time but there was a lot of fighting, especially with that editor — who was gay, believe it or not — to get that vision onto the page and keep it there and that [story] was the strongest piece of fighting that I had to do. My own agent, who was also gay, said "You mustn't do this, it will destroy your career before it's begun." But I did it anyway.

While we're on the topic, the really hard horror fanboys tend to be very masculine and kind of macho if you know what I mean. I've always been curious, from your perspective,

what their reaction was toward you once you officially came out?

There's two reactions; a public reaction and a private reaction. There's what they feel they have to say and what they really think. I will occasionally get — on a website or Amazon.com, where people are invited to review books — a *Books of Blood* fan will come on and complain about—

Sacramento or Galilee, right?

You got it. They complain about it being a taggot novel or whatever. You can go to those pages and read that unpleasantness for yourself if you so choose.

But I think that, for the most part, the genre's reaction was "Yeah, we already knew that."

Yeah, that's right! It's not like I didn't put signals in the books from word one. And from word one, those signals were the things that came under fire from my editor, they were the things she wanted taken out. Much later on, when they were doing a special edition of the *Books of Blood*, they wanted me to do a special introduction and we had recently had the Halloween parade here in West Hollywood. My other half had gone as a demon, as a very well-hung demon.

Fantastic!

[laughing] Yeah, he's a black man but he depicted himself many shades blacker, he'd hung a thirteen-inch dildo from his groin, had a horse's tail, horns, the whole bit. So I was writing about this in the introduction to the book thinking, with all the years that have passed, there would be no problem with me mentioning that my husband was here dressed with an enormous penis

and these huge, low-hanging balls and such. Well man, here we are and sixteen years have passed and the same woman, the same gay editor had exactly the same problem. She said, "We can't publish this. You need to remove all references to testicles and penis." I mean, it's so monumentally stupid and narrow-minded that it's almost funny.

Is there a difference in the way people from other countries, say Latin America or Europe, perceive your work?

It's funny you ask that because I just came back from Holland and I enjoyed some of the most engaging interviews because there was no real sense that anybody was coming at me with a narrow mind. I mean, what's interesting about this interview, to interrupt myself for a moment, here are you with a magazine called *Rue Morgue* and obviously a readership that likes horror, and I am one of those people. But nevertheless, we've talked, you and I, many times about painting, music, literature, philosophy and children's fiction and we are as passionate and enthusiastic about other areas of genre as we are about horror.

We immerse ourselves in as many creative disciplines as we can, much like you.

That's it. What it comes down to is two words: creation and imagination. The thing that all the genres which I like to work in — what we'll loosely call fantasy, what we'll loosely call horror, what we'll loosely call children's fiction — have in common is a sense of rules of reality, as they were written down by some wise old farts, are regularly violated in my fiction. I like fiction that violates the rules of reality, that says look, anything can happen in the world I'm about to

THOUGHT CLIVE BARKER WAS DONE WITH FIDDLING?
BEHOLD! THE GOSPEL OF DARKNESS III PLANS TO MAKE MANIFEST.

BARKER'S BLACK BIBLE

BY JEN VUCKOVIC



TORTURED SOULS

Barker continues to flesh out the script for *Tortured Souls* — his newest demonic mythology based on the McFarlane toy line of the same name — for Universal Pictures. If all goes well, production should begin early 2005 with Barker behind the camera.

THE HISTORY OF THE DEVIL

Peter Filardi (*Flatliners*, *Salem's Lot* 2004) is writing a six-hour teleplay for the Sci Fi Channel and Lions Gate Television based on *The History of the Devil*, one of Barker's earliest Dog Company plays about the Devil's attempt to regain entry into heaven by calling a trial. Seraphim Films and Coote/Hayes Productions are co-producing.

THE DAMNATION GAME

Rick Ramage (*Stigmata*) is drafting a script for Warner Bros. and Phoenix Pictures to produce a cinematic adaptation of Barker's first novel, *The Damnation Game*, a grisly, zombie-filled tale loosely based on Shakespeare's *Tempest*.

DREAD

Drew McWeeny and Scott Swan (*Mortal Kombat: Domination*) have completed a draft of *Dread* (a short from the *Books of Blood*) for 20th Century Fox. *Dread* is about a man who locks people in dark rooms for days with nothing to eat, save for a rancid plate of meat, in an obscene effort to experiment with fear and the human psyche.

THE THIEF OF ALWAYS

Barker, along with Anthony DiBlasi and Joe Daley of Seraphim Films, has recently closed a deal to co-produce a live action feature based on *The Thief of Always*, adapted and directed by Kelly Asbury (*Shrek 2*) for 20th Century Fox.

ABARAT

John Harrison (*Dune*, *Children of Dune*) is writing a live action feature based on Barker's new series of children's fiction for Disney.

WEAVERWORLD

The long-awaited *Weaveworld* six-hour miniseries from Showtime is currently in development with Stephen Molton (*Deep Blue*) pushing the pen.

UNTITLED ANTHOLOGY

A new collection of short stories, in the vein of the *Books of Blood* is also in the works. The anthology will include the long-anticipated final *Hellraiser* story, starring Harry D'Amour and Pinhead — Barker's farewell to the entire mythology. The collection will also contain a number of stories that are now out of print along with Barker's unpublished poetry *The Scarlet Gospels*. Fall 2005.

UNTITLED ART BOOK

A new coffee-table book of art will be published by Rizzoli Universe in 2005. The tome will be a 9" X 12", 352-page, full-colour deluxe edition featuring over 300 colour images and 75 black and white ink sketches. Barker is



asking anyone who owns his paintings to send photographs for inclusion in the book. Visit www.clivebarker.com for details.

THE THIEF OF ALWAYS COMIC

A three-issue, 48-page comic series based on *The Thief of Always*, written by Chris Oprisko with art by Gabriel Hernandez hits comic shops this September. From IDW Publishing.

INFERNAL PARADE

This September, McFarlane toys releases a new line of demented figures based on Barker's twisted carnival designs. Each figure comes with new Barker fiction; collect all six to complete the mythology.

ABARAT: DAYS OF MAGIC, NIGHTS OF WAR

Enter a world of magic, mystery and nightmares. An epic in the tradition of *Narnia*, the *Oz* books and *Lord of the Rings*, the second in *The Books of Abarat* series graces shelves Sept 21, complete with 125 new paintings. ♫





Raising Hell: Barker directs his classic film and (left) the grisly return to form in Hellbound.



describe. Doors can open which can lead you to the Sea of Quiddity or Hell, or you can be confronted with two cities built of human beings or whatever. Any number of fantasies are plausible and they will be treated by this author, not with a tongue in my cheek, as is so often the case these days. We've come to this ironic place in our fiction where it seems to be cool to be ironic and I can't think of anything less interesting than irony. It's such a dull position to take, to say I'm not going to take any of this seriously, I'm way too cool to take anything seriously. I want my horror serious, I want my fantasy serious. I want my writers, painters and filmmakers to treat my imaginations as something sacred and to take me to these incredibly important, strange places with real passion and real commitment to the idea of dreaming with our eyes open, which is what they're doing. It irritates me when I find that a lot of North American horror fiction has become this kind of ironic, tongue-in-cheek stuff. It kills the viability of the material.

There's a substantial amount of Catholic imagery in your conception of horror. Is that coming from your upbringing or artistic interest?

That's right. It's a very useful area to play in. I think if you can hook people, excuse the phrase, with the use of those images and draw them into something that ends up being rather more complex than it first appears. *Hellraiser* would be a perfect example. A number of things started that imagery off, one was punk obviously and piercing, which was just beginning to be around in England when I wrote the story. One was definitely Catholic imagery, yes, profound and intense Catholicism.

But you're not Catholic yourself, right?

No, everybody is welcome in my church. It would be hard for me as a gay man to subscribe to Catholicism, but it's good theatre. Church was by no means forced upon us growing up and I'm grateful to my parents for that because it meant that when I found [William] Blake, and Blake once said: "Both read the bible day and night but thou read'st black—

—where I read white." From The Everlasting Gospel.

Yes! I love that because basically he is saying that you must go to the bible and make it your own. It's your story and that's what irritates me massively about the kind of fundamentalist positions people take as having the only *true* interpretation of the holy book. Any kind of fundamentalism is abhorrent to me because it tends to be a simplification. I think these kinds of readings of holy books are covers for cowardly men

to conceal or partially conceal some sickness motivated by some childhood trauma perhaps, hatred for the humanity of women, for the humanity of gay men and women, for the dignity of animals. Don't get me started because then I'll get really pissed, it's the only thing that really pisses me off.

Clive, are you afraid of dying?

Yes, of course. I think it would be a liar who said he was totally indifferent to the prospect of saying goodbye to the world that I'm looking at through my window without the full and certain knowledge that there is some new world or some new vision of this world waiting on the other side. On the other hand, there are days when that fear disappears completely, often because I've found some place of contentment with myself and I'm at rest with myself. One of the reasons why death scares me is because I still feel I have a lot to do. I'm a very restless kind of guy so it's important to me that all the stories or as many of the stories that I've got in my head, or as many of the images I've got in my head can be on paper or on canvas, or on film before I shuffle off this mortal coil. I'm here at 51, don't think I'm even halfway through the stuff that's in my head, there's so much stuff. I made two paintings yesterday and it was great because I was able to sit back at twelve o'clock at night and go, cool, there are two pictures that did not exist this morning. That's the major reason why I'm scared of death. I don't want to be taken away from the work which I've got to do until it's done. I hope when it is done, I'll be a lot more comfortable and I'll say, yay, okay let me go sit down with the ghosts of my dogs and birds and the ghosts of the loved ones that went before and rest a while.

I admire you for all of the creative disciplines you express yourself through. Would you say that some of them are more given to horror than others? Do you think it's easier to frighten or communicate horror through plays or art or literature?

Yeah I do. This is a huge conversation. I think the simplest thing to say is that each of the mediums allows you to do something different in the way of scaring people. I have been most profoundly scared in the theatre, not in the cinema, but in the theatre where actions were going on in front of me. Theatre can very much do that. I think movies are good at "boo!" — movies are good at the shock, the big, fat, horrible close-up of the wormy head coming out of the boat in *Jaws* or Reagan spewing chunks of green puke at the priest in *The Exorcist*, movies are very good at that kind of stuff. What they're less good at is what the word does, which is to make you profoundly uneasy because you are taken into a consciousness — and this is the kind of thing that Ramsey Campbell does with genius — of a

man or woman who is... crazy and I think Poe used to do this brilliantly well. Of course, he was always talking about himself which is fine. Books have this marvellous way of making you a co-conspirator in their creation – whether it's horror or fantasy and I'm sure this is true of romances. It's certainly true of erotica, which I love to read, I much prefer to read a book of erotica than look at pictures because then I become a co-conspirator, then I can summon up whatever images I want, suggested by these words. I always say this about the fantasy work that I've written – *Weave-world, Imagica* – everybody who's read *Imagica* has their own *Imagica* as far as I'm concerned, they have their own five dominions, their own special version of that which is unique to them.

So you would say that literature is the venue by which to express horror?

Finally, if I had my choice, yes. Certainly I've never been significantly scared by a painting.

I've been significantly moved and disturbed by paintings, particularly Goya.

Oh absolutely! Sir Kenneth Clark [Director of the National Gallery, London] said that there were pictures by Goya that he could not bear to look at. I hope this interview gets some of our readers to go out and look at few Goyas to see if they are equally as troubled by them as yourself and Sir Kenneth Clark, that would be quite a cool thing. Oh, and music can scare me: Diamanda Galas playing in a certain time of night, Coil can do it, Wagner can do it, god bless his empty soul. It chills me.

Are you interested in the value of horror academically, such as art criticism of the genre in general?

I recently went to a lecture by the author of *Monsters in the Closet* [Harry M. Benshof], which is about homosexuality and the horror film, a superb book and his lecture was really interesting because he had an academic take on the subject. I'm not terribly interested as an artist in reading anything academic that's written about my own material, I think it would make me self-conscious but I absolutely do believe that it's not only of value but it's absolutely necessary. One of the things we have to do is fight to get onto the reading lists of universities and colleges so that we're not left out in the rain as we have been – I'm talking about writers of horror and fantasy now – for so long. A lot of that kind of condemnation originates at an academic level. I was told in university over and over again that reading fantasy, Tolkien or C.S. Lewis or indeed horror, was completely valueless.

To whom? Society or students?

It was valueless to me as a student. I was told I couldn't do anything with that information, that there was nothing valuable about an author who attempts to scare you. We had a double lecture one semester on Whitman and Poe and the professor managed to get through both parts of this lecture without ever mentioning that Poe wrote fiction that was intended to send a chill down people's spines, nor ever mentioned that Whitman was a cocksucker. That said a lot about where the university's priorities were.



Nightbreed: A concept sketch of Deckard and (inset) Cronenberg fills the role.



COLLECTIBLES FROM HELL

It's been seventeen years since Frank Cotton first loosed Pinhead upon the world, and the multimedia barrage of *Hellraiser* collectibles that continue to stain shelves is a testament to our enduring fascination with that sexy, sadomasochistic angel from Hell....

HELLRAISER SERIES 3 TOYS

The third installment in the NECA *Hellraiser* action figure series features a skinless Frank in all his sinewy and gory glory, the *Bloodline* Twins, a *Hell on Earth* posed Pinhead, the sexy Female cenobite, and finally, a Deluxe Boxed Set of Dr. Channard! Collect all four and assemble your own 18" light-up Leviathan.

THE HELLRAISER CHRONICLES

Bless our fleshhooks, Titan Books has finally reprinted the hard-to-find companion to the first three *Hellraiser* films. Originally published in 1992, this gorgeous book is packed to the throat with rare photographs, concept art and insightful comments by Barker and editor Stephen Jones.

HELLRAISER: COLLECTED BEST TPB, VOL. 3

Checker Book Publishing's *Hellraiser: Collected Best* series of glossy trade paperbacks is dedicated to remastering original, Barker-licensed shorts previously issued in four-colour under Marvel's Epic imprint between the years 1989 and 1992. If you missed these deadly delights during that time, now's your chance to devour them all in one huge, 350-odd page chomp.



HELLRAISER COLLECTION: LAMENT CONFIGURATION SET

If you have yet to purchase a region-free player, do it before September 20th, when Anchor Bay UK unleashes the ultimate *Hellraiser* box set. Dressed up to look like one of Barker's deadly puzzle boxes, the set collects the first three films, each loaded up with new extras including commentaries, featurettes and galleries. A fourth disc – available in the box set only – contains Barker's early student films, along with a featurette that discusses them.

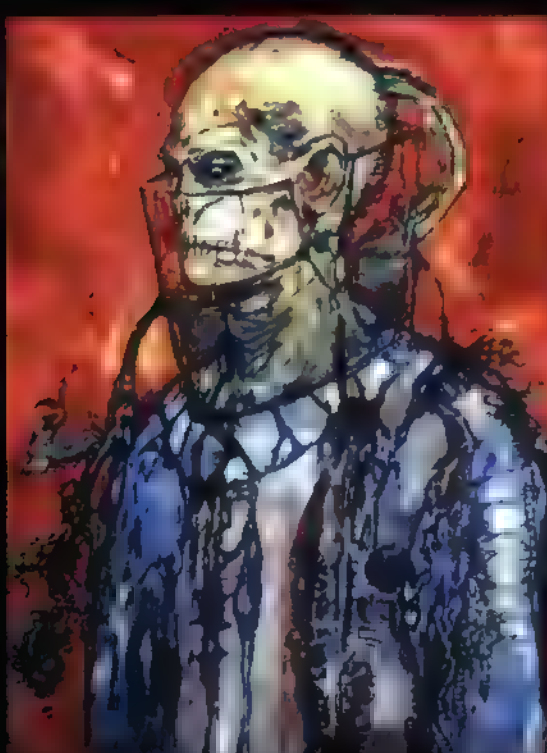
Jen Vuckovic and Gary Butler

"IT IRRITATES ME WHEN I FIND THAT A LOT OF NORTH AMERICAN HORROR FICTION HAS BECOME THIS KIND OF IRONIC, TONGUE-IN-CHEEK STUFF. IT KILLS THE VIABILITY OF THE MATERIAL." *Cine Barker*

So then, in your opinion, what is the value of horror to society?

I don't think we can even begin a conversation like this in the space that we have. I think you can go back to Greek tragedy and in that you can see the roots of horror. You want horror? Check out the plays of Euripides, I mean this is really dark, dark stuff – the killing of families by their own mothers, the blindings and so on – it's relentless, and those terrible judgements that come down from the gods. It's very powerful stuff. I think there hasn't been a period that I know of in the history of literature which has not had room for that which we would characterize as horrific.

The last time we spoke you were criticizing modern horror films for not being frightening enough. Do you still feel that way?



Yes, but there are honourable exceptions. You know, six months ago, and this is how fast it all changes, I would have been saying we're being out-performed by Asian movies. But since then, even that source has started to seem a little repetitive. Have you noticed that?

Of course, it's dying a derivative death actually.

Yeah, it's already dying of its own echoes. I recently saw an amazing film from Germany called *Tattoo* [by Robert Schwentke]. It's not a perfect movie but I liked it, and you'll see some echoes of the *Books of Blood* in there. But it's a very powerful picture and beautifully performed. It's very interesting to me to see how quickly movies consume their own children. We watched the CGI revolution reach fruition and explode on itself, or rather, implode on itself. I would say the implosion happened about fourteen minutes into *Van Helsing* [laughs]. I mean, not that we couldn't see it coming but it was a profoundly disappointing picture. I am bored with those sorts of effects, if we end up making *Tortured Souls*, which I hope we do, and I get to helm it, then I'll do whatever I can to limit the CGI to a handful of shots, scenes that we simply couldn't achieve any other way.

What is the current state of the *Tortured Souls* script?

I write by hand, you know that. I'm sitting long-hand right now in front of page 299 of my handwritten draft of that script which equals about three to one, so we're coming towards the last twenty pages of it and I will hand it in to Universal in about two weeks time. Then they'll tell me whether we'll make the movie or not.

Your new hard horror label *Midnight Picture Show* has recently green lit one of the *Books of Blood* stories. Tell us more about that.

The prospect was this: I have held off making movies based on the *Books of Blood* for many years now. I mean, there have been a few. Obviously there was *Candyman* [see sidebar] and *Lord of Illusions* but way before that, there was *Rawhead Rex*.

Which was the first feature based on one of the *Books of Blood* stories.

Yes, god help us, but there haven't been a lot. There are six books of fiction there and I've kept them from being used up partially because I've always dreamed that at some point I would have a chance to make a library of movies based upon this material so that I would have the cinematic equivalent of the *Books of Blood* called the *Films of Blood* and that's what I think we have here. We have investors who are excited by the prospect of letting us make two movies a year, which we will have creative control over, which will be very strong, hardcore horror movies, and even stronger and more hardcore when we get to the DVD versions which I want to make as complete an experience as possible so that in a few years time we'll be able to go to our DVD locker and take out fifteen *Films of Blood*. That's our dream and it's shared by our investors. You've met Joe [Daley] and Anthony [DiBlasi] and you know what cool guys they are, they're really passionate about this, as am I.

Will you be directing any of them?

That's not impossible at all. It depends on scheduling, my life – as you know, because you've been to my home – has to be calculated and calibrated within an inch because I'm doing so many things. I'm having this conversation with you, I'm sitting in front of this text, I have to write four more pages before I leave this desk, then I'll have something to eat, take a couple of meetings and go next door and paint. Every day, I have to work it all out, it's like a jigsaw puzzle because I need to paint another 60 paintings for *Abarat 3*, a cold chill runs down my back when I think about that. But in terms of *Midnight Picture Show*, we're going to start off with *Midnight Meat Train* which should hopefully reach audiences by next summer.

Awesome, that's a grisly, standout story in the first volume. So you're looking at slightly smaller than Hollywood-size budgets on these films, correct?

I kind of actively want to make them modestly budgeted so that we can have the freedom to make them the way we want to, so that we are not tempted into doing some silly piece of CGI nonsense and so that we keep ourselves honest. It's so easy to be pulled off course and we've been planning this for such a long time that I think we know what kind of movies we want. Our hope is that we will have the same special effects team work with us on all the movies. The





Back To Blood: Barker intends to get his hands wet again.
(Opposite page) Two views of Abarat: Days of Magic, Nights of War.

model really is Hammer who made several movies a year with the same team over and over again. It's a family, a repertory company and I'm hugely excited by the prospect. One of the things you miss as a painter and a writer is the collaboration of minds. I've had many years of pretty much solitary creation now and I miss camaraderie, and to have that wonderful spark when a bunch of people are all pulling in the same direction to make something that's really good without having a lot of money to do it with.

It seems that it's a good time to do it, the horror film has recently infiltrated the mainstream again. Why do you think that is?

One of the things I've always argued is that we go to horror movies not because we are revolted by the thing we see but because privately – well, you and I not so privately – are elated and intrigued by the monstrous, and the monstrous draws us to the forbidden. You agree with that?

Absolutely. For both of us it seems more like a lifelong love affair with the forbidden than a passing interest or moment of elation.

You've got that right. You know, even the name of your magazine – forgetting the fact that it's a reference to Edgar Allen Poe, which a lot of people wouldn't know – having the word "Morgue" in the title, for a certain kind of straight person – and I don't mean sexually straight – would be a

total turnoff. Why would I buy a magazine with the word "Morgue" on it? But to you and I, the word "Morgue" is like a little beeper going DING! DING! DING! Buy me! Buy me! And that's because a morgue is a forbidden place, a morgue is place that we've been into but most people don't want to...

Experience unless they're dead and not able to experience it at all?

Indeed. But what's interesting these days is there are TV shows now, very popular TV shows – *Jordan's Crossing* and *Six Feet Under*, which deal with the business of death if you will, they've found their way into the mainstream marketplace. This is where the fun is, where we can play with people's levels. People look away and say this is too much but out of the corner of their eye they're fascinated by the stuff.

Which could explain why the Dawn of the Dead remake did so well and pushed The Passion of the Christ out of the box office. Zombies beat Jesus in a popularity contest. What does that say?

Well you know, they both got up from the dead! [laughs]

Thanks Clive, we're glad you're back. ☺

SWEETS TO THE SWEET

CANDYMAN (1992) DVD

Starring Virginia Madsen and Tony Todd
Written and directed by Bernard Rose
Columbia TriStar Home Entertainment

Candyman. Say his name four more times in front of a mirror and he'll rip you in two.

Candyman is the movie that immortalized actor Tony Todd as one of the genre's only serious black villains at a time when people were killing each other in the streets of LA during the Rodney King riots, a fact that is not lost on *Candyman's* creators, who speak extensively



on the subject of American racial politics throughout the special features of Columbia TriStar's new *Candyman* special edition DVD.

Based on Clive Barker's short story *The Forbidden* from his *Books of Blood* anthologies, and directed by Bernard Rose (*Paperhouse*), *Candyman* is a stylish modern gothic tale about urban legends, told as an urban legend, and masterfully scored by Philip Glass. At the centre of the story is the titular character, the ghost of a man with a hook for a hand who slaughters people who summon him with a special calling card.

Shot on location at the notorious Chicago housing project Cabrini Green, *Candyman* serves as one of the most successfully adapted Barker stories to date. Unfortunately, while the film and its intelligent narrative still hold up today, TriStar's new DVD transfer does not, it looks only marginally better than your average VHS and the new cover art also pales in comparison to the original release. Thankfully there are some cool bells and whistles here to make it all worthwhile.

The featurette *Sweets to the Sweet: The Candyman Mythos* treats viewers to interviews with Rose, Barker, Todd, producer Alan Poul and others, who take turns commenting on the link between the Candyman mythos and the real-life racial fears of the day. *Clive Barker: Raising Hell* offers the horror-lit icon a chance to discuss the author's role in the film and his thoughts on moviemaking in general. Now go look in a mirror and say his name five times and let us know what happens... or are you chicken?

Aaron Lupton





THEY CAME FROM WITHIN, A NEW CRITICAL BOOK,
DISSECTS THE INAUSPICIOUS BUT INFLUENTIAL HISTORY
OF CANADIAN HORROR CINEMA.

EXHUMING HORRORWOOD NORTH

BY JOHN W. BOWEN AND THE RUE MORQUETTE

Canadian horror cinema: in two words, David Cronenberg, right? Wrong! Never marvelled at the low-budget blood craze of *Cannibal Girls*? The tumorous terrors of *Spasms*? The zombie war-lore of *Deathdream*? The subpar horrors of *My Bloody Valentine*? Groundbreaking masterpieces like *The Changeling* and *Black Christmas*? Never heard of them? Canada does have its own canon of crude and influential classics, but most people - Canadians included - have no idea that they even exist.

The fact is, while the movie industry was in its infancy and America was capitalizing on the financial viability of the new medium, Canada was preoccupied building a railroad and importing citizens from other countries to populate its desolate prairies. There was work to be done and, as a result, the burgeoning business of horror cinema went largely ignored in the Great White North until the early '60s, and even then you can count the entries on one goalie-gloved hand.

Maybe that's why in his introduction to *They Came From Within: A History of Canadian Horror Cinema*, author Caelum Vatnsdal writes, "It's no exaggeration to say that the history of Canadian fiction filmmaking is, in the main, one of catastrophe, neglect and wasted potential."

Like, ouch, eh? This is exactly the kind of honest criticism that routinely causes Cana-

dians to get their flannel panties in a bunch, mainly because it's painfully accurate but also because it's coming from - gasp! - a fellow Canadian. After all, it's unpatriotic for Canadians to expect other Canadians to examine their own shortcomings objectively. For further proof, channel the spirit of the late great Mordecai Richler at your next séance and he'll give you a long, loud earful about the perils of telling Canadians the truth about themselves.

It's a curiously convenient problem we Canadians have: we piss and moan ad nauseum about how little Americans know or care to know about us and yet we take advantage of that very same ignorance daily as a means of sweeping our own failures and scandals under the rug. We decry the average American's image of us as, according to Vatnsdal, "a nation of beer-swilling, hockey-playing, poetry-spouting, pot-smoking, documentary-loving hosers," but at least that same average American knows next to nothing about our corrupt federal government, our poorly-equipped, scan-

dal-plagued military or our ongoing maltreatment of native Indians.

In terms of cinema it also means that most Americans have never seen gems like *Pin* (1988) or *Deathdream* (1974), the first horror film to intelligently touch on the effects that the Vietnam War had on returning soldiers (and also Tom Savini's very first FX gig!). But chances are they've also had the good fortune to miss *Death Ship* (1980) and *The Corpse Eaters* (1974), Canada's first and undeniably worst zombie film. (On the musical front, sadly, they do seem to have taken notice of Celine Dion and Nickelback.)

In *They Came From Within*, recently released from Arbeiter Ring Publishing, Vatnsdal doesn't

take our country to task over bad government or social injustice, but since popular culture - even such a marginal subcategory of it as the Canadian horror film - is usually an accurate barometer for the national psyche, the same principle applies here on a smaller scale. Along with that comes the attendant risk of sparking that trademark





Canadian righteous indignation. In other words, the book seeks to answer two questions: what are our horror movies about and why? And, what constitutes a Canadian horror film anyway?

The author candidly describes the Canadian film industry as "crippled, wary and dumbly resentful like a puppy repeatedly kicked as it was learning to walk. The American film industry was most often wearing the boots, but it was Canadians who allowed the booting."

Vatnsdal – a Canadian filmmaker and journalist by trade – knows he's risking ostracism by speaking plainly, but he stands his ground.

"I did give the idea of potentially pissing people off a thought," the author recently told *Rue Morgue*, "or worse yet, making them feel bad about their movies. But I did dedicate [the book] to anyone who's ever made a Canadian hor-

ror movie, and I meant that. I guess I took the tough love route. Canadian films get a bad rap, but it's often for the wrong reasons, and on the other hand, there's certainly no point in being a mindless cheerleader. I thought I'd try for middle ground, like the good Canadian boy I am. Ultimately I decided to apply the Cronenberg rule on artistic self-censorship, which states: 'Don't ever engage in it.'"

Vatnsdal starts off his examination of the all-too-brief history of the Canadian horror movie with the discussion of a few false starts; early projects that seemed to curse the filmmaking industry before it even got going, citing two productions in the early '20s and '30s that



CARCINOGENIC CATHODES

REVIEW BY [Name]

Starring James Woods, Deborah Harry and Jack Creley

Written and directed by David Cronenberg
Criterion

Long live the new flesh! David Cronenberg's near-future sci-fi horror film *Videodrome* is a study about the evolution of thought patterns into test patterns. It's a film that's as much about the future whose relevance persists like a cancerous technokumor.

Here's the meltdown, if you can wrap your head around it. Max Guegan (James Woods) is a man who records a pirated video feed of a snuff TV program called Videodrome. His masochistic girlfriend Nicki Brand (a young and sexy Blondie) promptly leaves him to be a "contestant" on the show just as Renn learns from media prophet Brian O'Blivion (Creley) that Videodrome is really a Trojan horse for an insidious television signal that causes tumours and hallucinations. Videodrome starts channel surfing with Renn's already infected reality, eventually transforming his body into a fully-programmable home entertainment center.

All attempts to view *Videodrome* as a dissection of television violence prove contradictory; Cronenberg's film is as much about the future as it is about the present. In fact, the film operates best as a thinly-veiled satire of popular Canadian media personalities, relying on the dark humour that

improbable monikers like "Dr. O'Blivion" and his "Cathode Ray Mission" charity are topped only by a "hand" grenade, a vaginal chest cavity, and a cancer-secreting gun that gives the film its remarkable, if barely comprehensible, climax.

Criterion's new two-disc set features a pristine, anamorphic transfer supported by considerable extras, including commentaries by Cronenberg, Woods and Harry. Rick Baker's unforgettable effects are meticulously documented in audio clips, an exhaustive still gallery and a short film. Also here are the unedited AV features seen in the film, a panel discussion with Cronenberg, John Landis and John Carpenter, Cronenberg's 2000 short film *Camera*, and promotional materials, including a hilarious "new wave" trailer.

Though the technology in the film is no longer state-of-the-art, *Videodrome* holds up remarkably well. In fact, the quaintly obsolete video equipment gives the film an added visceral punch for modern audiences. If you're looking for a more accessible, bare-bones DVD, Criterion's definitive release is the one to go for. For those who want the best, the breathing Beta videocassette.

Paul Corupe



The Changeling: Canada's classic ghost story

resulted in several on-set deaths. As a result, the industry lay pretty much dormant for half a century to follow, with the exception of a few short horror films including *The Werewolf* (1913), largely considered to be the first lycanthrope movie ever made (at a scant eighteen minutes in length!).

The first legitimate Canadian horror feature didn't come about until, believe it or not, 1961, with Julian Roffman's *The Mask*, also the first Canuck film to make its money back before it was released thanks, in part, to the producers' decision to resurrect a William Castle gimmick and shoot the movie in 3D. But even after the commercial success of the Toronto-lensed film, Canada would go five solid years without another entry in its horror artillery.

Finally, in the '70s, the implementation of a tax shelter by the Canadian federal government helped jump-start the industry by encouraging filmmakers to make movies in the country in exchange for a tax break on the production. This explains why the "tax shelter years" boast a comparatively large number of horror titles, some of which are arguably the country's best to date, but the ratio between treasure and trash is still ridiculously low.

Canada's now-infamous film tax shelter era (specifically, a 100 percent Capital Cost Allowance, in effect from the mid-'70s to the early '80s) is as much responsible for that disparity as it is for the proper start of "Horrorwood North" and receives some pretty unflinching scrutiny by Vatnsdal, a period the author lambasts as "a deeply ignoble time in Canadian history."

"Abuse was rampant," he writes, "not only of the tax laws but of cinema itself."

That's not to say that Vatnsdal skimps on praise for Canadian horror - far from it. Cronenberg's films, naturally, are fodder for much enthusiastic and scholarly analysis throughout *They Came From Within*, as are genre milestones like Bob Clark's masterful slasher *Black Christmas* (1974) and lost gems like *Rituals* (1977). Peter Carter's shocking survivalist, *Deliverance*-inspired flick that takes place in the remote Northern Canadian wilderness. Inspiration aside, *Rituals* stands on its own feet as one of the strongest entries in the Can-horror canon and was released on video in the US with a full ten minutes of footage excised from it to obtain an R rating.

Vatnsdal is rather guarded in his praise for more recent pictures like the mighty *Ginger Snaps* (2000) but gives the film and its sequels props nonetheless. Plenty of ink is also spilled on American films shot in Canada as well as US lensed productions that employed disproportionately large amounts of Canadian talent.

Still, his "tough love" approach keeps things balanced here, and while he laments the parade of tax shelter era drivel like

"IT'S NO EXAGGERATION TO SAY THAT THE HISTORY OF CANADIAN FICTION FILMMAKING IS, IN THE MAIN, ONE OF CATASTROPHE, NEGLECT AND WASTED POTENTIAL."

Death Ship (1980) and *Humongous* (1982) to name but two of seemingly hundreds - he also acknowledges *The Brood* (1979), *Videodrome* (1983) and *The Changeling* (1980) as some of the truly worthwhile souvenirs of the period.

Indeed, Peter Medak's *The Changeling* remains one of the most chilling ghost stories to ever grace celluloid (see Classic Cut RM#17). Not only was it the first film to win Best Picture in the Genie Awards, formerly the Canadian Film Awards, but it's inspired and been referenced in countless modern horror films around the world, including Hideo Nakata's *Ringu* (1998) and Alejandro Amenábar's *The Others* (2001). *The Changeling* is one of the more well-known Canadian horror pictures due in large part to

the casting of veteran American actor George C. Scott in the lead role. It falls smack-dab in the middle of the golden era of the Canadian horror film (the '70s and '80s) and can be considered the most frightening entry ever produced, second only to Bob Clark's risky sorority house massacre film *Black Christmas*.

For all that we horror fans look back on the '70s and early '80s with fondness (and for good reason), the period wasn't particularly kind to

Canadian filmmakers (like Clark) who strayed outside the claustrophobic boundaries of "acceptable" subject matter. There's a lot to love about *Goin' Down the Road* and *Anne of Green Gables*, but the would-be intelligentsia back then failed to grasp the fact that these stories weren't particularly



RUE MORGUE PRESENTS... THE TOP 13 CANADIAN CREEPS!

NORTHERN FRIGHTFEST

BY PAUL CORUPE

1. BLACK CHRISTMAS (1974)

Before Jason, Freddy, or Michael Myers, there was Billy. Arguably the first North American slasher, *Black Christmas* weaves terror and humour into a festive holiday package. Billy takes up residence in a sorority house attic to make obscene and threatening phone calls to the coeds downstairs, whom he dispatches in creative ways throughout the film. Unlike American stalk and slash flicks, Billy is not a charismatic murderer killing promiscuous teens and tossing off wry one-liners; he's an ambiguous figure that represents the audience's deepest psychological fears. *Halloween*, appearing four years later, was originally conceived as a sequel.

2. THE CHANGELING

(1980)

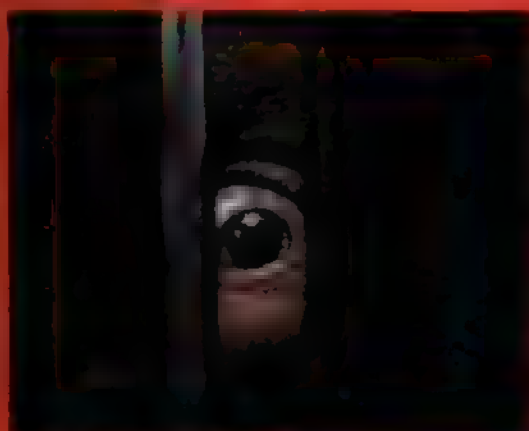
Importing an American star up to "Hollywood North" allowed producers to receive a Canadian government tax break while ensuring a healthy box office with Peter Medak's *The Changeling*, a supernatural mystery starring George C. Scott as John Russell, a music teacher who gets some serious hints that the historic mansion he's renting may be haunted. His suspicion is confirmed with a little research (including a haunting seance), and Russell soon finds himself on a quest to right a long forgotten wrong. A distinct change of pace from most Canadian horror films, *The Changeling* features unforgettable ghostly images, including the infamous "baby carriage rolling down the staircase" scene.

3. SHIVERS (1975)

Before *Shivers*, Canadian horror was based on religious or psychological themes with few exceptions. David Cronenberg's debut changed all that by having mental horror manifest itself physically. Known in the US as *They Came From Within*, *Shivers* is the story of an apartment complex overrun by a parasitic disease that gives the inhabitants an unhealthy appetite for sex and murder. Before it went on to box office success, *Shivers* was vilified by critics as "worse than junk" and a misuse of tax dollars. Now, it can be seen as an early example of Cronenberg's obsessions and the horrific possibilities of Canada's federally-sponsored healthcare system.

4. DERANGED (1974)

Serial killer Ed Gein was the model for the villains in *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, *Psycho*, and *The Silence of the Lambs*, but no film cuts as close to Gein's real-life exploits as *Deranged*. Unable to mentally part with his deceased mother, Gein stand-in Ezra Cobb decides to bring her back home from the grave. His knowledge of taxidermy only goes so far, though, and Cobb soon realizes he needs a fresh supply of "spare



parts" to repair his mother's decomposing body. Even though this was only his second credit, Tom Savini's make-up effects are outstanding. *Deranged* succeeds in mixing gallows humour with Canadian documentary-style realism, and features country

songs by Canuck musical institution Stompin' Tom Connors.

5. DEAD RINGERS (1988)

Canadian dramas have long featured imperfect men trying to figure out what makes stronger female characters tick, but *Dead Ringers* supplants any kind of intimate personal knowledge with a chilling, anatomical logic that delves into the grotesque aspects of sexuality. Based on a true story, *Dead Ringers* is perhaps the ultimate expression of Cronenberg's obsessions.

6. GINGER SNAPS (2000)

After lying dormant for almost a decade, Canadian horror was revitalized by *Ginger Snaps*. As Ginger enters puberty, she begins drifting apart from her sister Brigitte. Their relationship is tested further when Ginger is bitten by a werewolf, and Brigitte must stave off the lycanthropic curse that comes with it. Just as fellow Canadian David Cronenberg's *The Fly* reinvented the classic Vincent Price film, John Fawcett's hormonally-charged *Ginger Snaps* updates *I Was a Teenage Werewolf* with a fun, female twist.

7. THE MASK (1961)

The first Canadian horror film was Julian Roffman's 3-D spook show *The Mask*. Psychiatrist Dr. Barnes comes to possess an ancient Indian ritual mask which triggers a hallucinogenic

trance in whomever wears it. Movie patrons were given a cardboard "mask" with built-in 3-D glasses and were invited to join Dr. Barnes in his surreal nightmare world of flying eyeballs, skeletons and snakes. Beyond its more visceral thrills, *The Mask* is a chilling metaphor for drug use that takes the same progressive attitude towards addiction as Canadian Government-sponsored documentaries of the time.

8. PIN: A PLASTIC NIGHTMARE (1988)

Sander Stern's *Pin* is an unforgettable character-driven flick and one of the last gasps of Canadian horror in the 1980s before the end of the tax shelter boom. David Hewlett puts in a brilliantly understated performance as Leon, a schizophrenic convinced that a life-size anatomical dummy named Pin is alive. Leon is a frightening extension of the ineffective male heroes that populate Canadian dramas, dangerously projecting his insecure masculinity on one of the creepiest inanimate objects ever seen.

9. RITUALS (1977)

Peter Carter's backwoods horror film enlists Hal Holbrook as the head of a band of five doctors roughing it in the Canadian wilderness, only to find that a mysterious stalker is trying to humiliate and destroy them for some unnamed revenge. *Deliverance* and *The Last House on the Left* were obvious inspirations for a rash of backwoods revenge-themed Canadian horror films in the 1970s, but *Rituals* is the best of the lot; one of the few films to really utilize the Canadian landscape as a character.

10. SCANNERS (1981)

As the 1980s ended, David Cronenberg's films thematically regressed from "body horror" back to the mind, the opposite direction of his Canadian contemporaries. Darryl Revok is the revenge-bent leader of an army of dissident Scanners; medically-created mutants with telepathic powers. To stop them, scientists recruit another Scanner for a psychic showdown. *Scanners* represents a turning point in Cronenberg's career, as he crept out of the exploitation film ghetto towards more mainstream success.

TOP 13 CONTINUED ON PAGE 28...

JOHN WILL NEVER EAT SHISH KEBAB AGAIN.

Steven will never ride a motorcycle again. Greg will never lift weights again. What's killing Conrad High's mobbish top too? At the rate they're going there will be no one left for Virginia's birthday party...alive.

Happy Birthday to Me

Six of the most bizarre murders you will ever see.

IT IS FACTS

PRAY YOU'RE NOT INVITED

THE CURTAINS CASE

Could there be anything more fitting for a Canadian slasher than a killing on an ice skating rink? Predominantly Canadian casts were rare in the tax shelter era of the early 1980s, but Richard Ciupka's *Curtains* features solid performances by some of the country's best. Sole non-Canuck Samantha Eggar plays an actress whose insane antics get her booted from a movie. To fill her role, the director invites six different actresses to his house for auditions, but a killer in an old hag mask has other casting ideas. *Curtains* is bolstered by some interesting production design and one of the creepiest dolls since Talkie Tina.

12. PROM NIGHT III: THE LAST KISS (1989)

Mary Lou returns to Hamilton High where she seduces average teenager Alex. Soon, she is willing to do anything for her new love - especially if it causes casualties. For creative kills

and a well-written script, *Prom Night III* is a horror film that's not just a slasher, but a slasher with a heart. **A+**

13. PSYCHO GIRLS (1985)

A well-written, sardonic horror film made for just \$150,000. *Psycho Girls* was written as a "freaky nasty" in England. Sure the plot is just a set up for the gruesome torture sequence in the middle, but it's a damn good one. It's a horror film that picks up where Cronenberg left off in the early 1980s as one of the best examples of a government-funded Canadian horror film. **B+**

HONORABLE MENTIONS

The Girl Killer (1968), *Canada's Dark Side: Murder by Decree* (1974), *General Hospital: Happy Birthday to Me* (1980), *The Empty Nest* (1981), *Visiting Hours* (1982), *The Carpenter* (1989), *Blood & Donuts* (1995).

NORTHERN FRIGHT FACTS

The first Canadian horror film was *The Execution* (1911), a silent film about a man who was executed by guillotine.

Canadian horror director Michael M. Roemer's *The Execution* (1911) was the first Canadian horror film. It was a silent film about a man who was executed by guillotine.

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Canadian horror film *The Execution* (1911) was the first Canadian horror film. It was a silent film about a man who was executed by guillotine.

Canadian producer Cinepix, making the character of Lisa, a Canadian creation.

Canadian horror film *The Execution* (1911) was the first Canadian horror film. It was a silent film about a man who was executed by guillotine.

Canadian horror film *The Execution* (1911) was the first Canadian horror film. It was a silent film about a man who was executed by guillotine.

13 ROE MORGUE

in a basement in the city. The film was a horror film about a man who was executed by guillotine.

Toronto-born screenwriter Garnett Weston.

Although born in Montreal, veteran actor Glenn Ford appeared in only one Canadian horror film, *The Execution* (1911).

Canadian horror film *The Execution* (1911) was the first Canadian horror film. It was a silent film about a man who was executed by guillotine.

Christopher Lee made his North American film debut in the Vancouver-shot horror film *The Keeper* (1976).

Canadian horror directors David Cronenberg, William Fruet and Bruce Campbell were the first Canadian horror directors.

Canadian horror film *The Execution* (1911) was the first Canadian horror film. It was a silent film about a man who was executed by guillotine.

Canadian horror film *The Execution* (1911) was the first Canadian horror film. It was a silent film about a man who was executed by guillotine.

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Canadian horror film *The Execution* (1911) was the first Canadian horror film. It was a silent film about a man who was executed by guillotine.

-compiled by Paul Corupe and Jen Vuckovic

recyclable, and seemed to take subversive filmmaking as a personal insult.

Sure, we gobbled up shocking fare from elsewhere as quickly as it could be dumped onto our plates – *The Exorcist*, *Taxi Driver*, and *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* went through the roof here, as they did worldwide – but it just wasn't proper for good Canadians to colour outside the lines.

"Being a Canadian horror filmmaker in the '70s," Vatnsdal says, "was like being a Kennedy brother in the '60s.

Assassins were everywhere, disguised as film critics and self-appointed guardians of the still-lonely redoubt that was Canadian culture."

And no Canadian filmmaker came in for more unwarranted abuse than Cronenberg himself, despite the fact that he would later become one of the country's most highly regarded cinematic exports. Vatnsdal recounts in excruciating detail the poisonous critical response to Cronenberg's debut feature *Shivers* (a.k.a. *They Came From Within*), entitled *The Parasite Murders* upon its initial release. Granted, *Shivers* hardly ranks as Cronenberg's most sophisticated film, and yet for all its graphic sex and violence, it was certainly a damn sight more sophisticated than most other Canadian films of the era.

Stodgy sourpuss Robert Fulford led the charge, writing under the pseudonym Mitchell Delaney in *Saturday Night* magazine, followed by more bile from similarly reactionary Canadian film scribes like the *Toronto Globe and Mail*'s Martin Knelman, temporarily derailing Cronenberg's fledgling career. Today, Cronenberg has a star on the Canadian Walk of Fame, less than a mile from *Rue Morgue*'s castle-like Toronto office, and *Shivers* is a beloved cult classic.

Also nearby, the *Black Christmas* house stands. Shot in 1974 entirely in Toronto, *Black Christmas* – the first North American slasher film (see Classic Cut RM#28) – was the inspiration for John Carpenter's *Halloween* four years later. Clark made his first mark on Canadian horror cinema with *Children Shouldn't Play*

With Dead Things (1972) where he first worked with writer/director Alan Ormsby, who went on to make *Deranged* two years later with Jeff Gillen (who served as assistant director to Clark on *Deathdream*).

Although both *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (1974) and *Psycho* (1960) were loosely based on real-life serial killer and necrophile Ed Gein, *Deranged*, lensed near Oshawa, Ontario, is by far the most graphically gruesome Gein adaptation ever made.

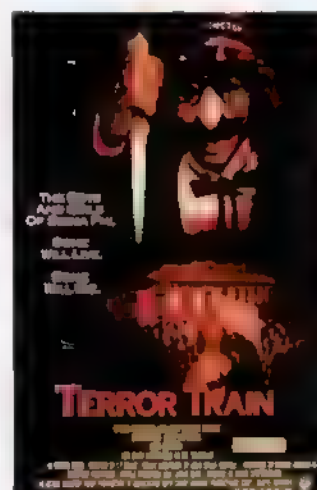
MGM recently released the film on DVD as a double threat with the non-Canadian *Motel Hell* (1980), missing the infamous scene of Ezra Cobb (Gein stand-in) digging out a corpse's brains with an ice cream scoop, FX courtesy, once again, of Tom Savini (along with Ormsby).

There's also no shortage of obscure films exhumed and autopsied in *They Came From Within*, and while we like to think that our own horror movie repertoire is pretty comprehensive – to the best of our knowledge we're still the only *Rue Morgue* staffers who've actually seen *Invasion of the Blood Farmers* – we'll readily admit that some of these titles provoked only the raised eyebrow of unfam-

iliarity and the shrugged shoulder of utter bafflement. *The Vulture* (1967)? *Creature of Comfort* (1968)? Pressed for answers, Vatnsdal gamely fesses up to never having heard of a number of these prior to researching the book.

"Chance played a part," he says. "I went into a dusty little video store on Bathurst Street in Toronto and found *Attack of the Flesh-Eating Tree* and *Attack of the Killer Squirrel* in a bargain bin for 50 cents apiece. They were obviously just home movies like the ones I used to make, but there they were in this cardboard box. *Creature of Comfort* I've never seen. I think it's in some vault in a basement on Bay Street – it

was repo'd by the bank that financed it – and I issued a plea via the CBC for the banker who had it to release it. Haven't heard anything yet. Give it up, you tightfisted bastards!"



HOSER HORROR TAKE TWO

canadian horror on film

by Edo van Belkom

McFarland & Co.

Jonesing for more macabre maple mayhem? Hot on the heels of *They Came From Within*, popular Canadian horror novelist Edo van Belkom (*Martyrs*, *Death Drives*, & *Semh*) brings us *Canadian Horror On Film and Television*, slated for release this fall from McFarland.

Besides contributing interviews that he conducted himself with filmmakers like William Fruet (*Death Weekend*, *Cries in the Night*), van Belkom has assembled an impressive group of co-conspirators to lend their talents, including TV's *Reel to Real* host Richard Crouse, *Admit One* host Christopher Heard, Montreal-based horror novelist Nancy Kilpatrick, filmmaker Ron Oliver (*Prom Night 2* and *3*), screenwriter Joe O'Brien (*RoboCop: Prime Directives*) and more.

And bless his cold, black heart, van Belkom also graciously invited the *Rue Crew* on board, and we were only too happy to oblige. Editor Rod Gudino contributes a lengthy essay on *Ginger Snaps*, while comic columnist Gary Butler looks back at the cult TV series *Hilarious House of Frightenstein*, a retrospective that also features the last interview *HHOF*'s beloved star/creator Billy Van gave before his death from cancer last year.

Michael Rowe, editor of the acclaimed *Queer Fear* series, weighs in with *Anne of Green Gables Has Risen From The Grave*, an overview of all things frightening and Canadian (although rumour has it he gives Shania Twain and Celine Dion a miss), and Nathan Tyler examines horror films shot in Canada during the infamous tax shelter era.

Not surprisingly, Schizoid Cinephile Chris Alexander and my bad self jumped at the opportunity to go scavenging through the dustiest video store delete bins in search of obscure gems. Chris eventually nabbed Canadian giallo *Curtains* while I exhumed the underappreciated backwoods stalker film *Rituals*, including a chat with producer/star Lawrence Dane.

Watch for *Canadian Horror On Film and Television* to hit bookstore shelves at some point during the 2004/05 hockey season.

John W. Bowen

THE NIGHT ANDY CAME HOME

Starring John Marley, Richard Backus and Lynn Carlin

Directed by Bob Clark

Written by Alan Ormsby

Blue Underground

Bob Clark's Canadian-financed, anti-war, zombie/vampire film *Deathdream* takes *The Monkey's Paw*, W.W. Jacobs' seminal tale of terror, and refashions it as a scathing indictment of Vietnam, creating a thought-provoking, emotionally raw, and absolutely nerve-shredding horror film in the process.

The Brooks family is left devastated with the news that their son Andy (Backus) has been killed in battle over in 'Nam. In desperation, Andy's mother

prays and pleads for her son's return, and indeed, that night Andy does come back, but something has changed about him. No longer the happy-go-lucky all-American lad he once was, Andy is now pale, drawn and borderline autistic.

Mom's undying love for her son helps her

turn a blind eye to his newfound catatonia but his father knows something's up because occasionally our boy Andy slips out into the night to kill the local townfolk. In the film's most terrifying scene, a near feral Andy confronts the local MD, who's wise to the boy's bloodlust and gets stabbed to death with a syringe for his troubles. Like a smack-starved junkie, Andy then injects the doctor's blood into his own dead veins. Unsettling stuff, to say the least.

Clark would go on to helm the trend-setting *Black Christmas* before nose-diving with *Porky's* and never looking back (*Baby Geniuses*, anyone?). *Deathdream* is not only his finest film, it's one of the most overlooked and important genre films ever made. Laced with tragedy and pathos, sporting a brilliant experimental score by Carl Zittrer, pre-Romero makeup effects by Ormsby and a fresh from 'Nam Tom Savini, the movie also has a jet black, macabre sense of gallows humour and a potent statement: that to deny the obvious horror around us, can only lead to catastrophe. It's a real downer and a movie that, after 30 years, not only holds up beautifully, but has a lingering, haunting power rarely seen in any genre.

Chris Alexander



Ginger Snaps - The Beginning: Quintessentially Canadian.

Vatnsdal also admits that Jerry Ciccoritti told him about *The Reincarnate* (1971), *Le Diable est Parmi Nous* (1972) was new to him and he had never heard of *The Vulture*.

"I can't remember how I found out about it, but I was overjoyed to find a copy at Suspect Video in Toronto," he says. "*The Corpse Eaters*, perhaps my most significant discovery, was also completely new to me."

Indeed, apart from the *Prom Night* movies, Canada's first and only horror film franchise, few titles beyond Cronenberg's films and *Black Christmas* made their way to mainstream distribution outside of the country. But that doesn't mean the exhaustive list of films unearthed by Vatnsdal aren't worth watching (see sidebar pg. 27 for the top 13 Canadian horror titles that are a necessary part of any genre fan's lexicon). It's just about time that someone else realized they warranted an entire book.

Besides being superbly written and soundly researched, much of the charm of *They Came From Within* lies in Vatnsdal's steadfast refusal to toss up a lot of easy answers, or indulge the urge to trumpet the dubious uniqueness of Canadians

(read: "we are not American") to the world. Aside from praising *Ginger Snaps - The Beginning* for its historical underpinnings ("It takes place in a fur trading fort, and what could be more Canadian than that?"), he's less concerned with what makes Canadian horror films distinctly Canadian (succinctly, according to Canadian content rules, the script or the director had to be Canadian for the film to qualify) than he is with shedding light on Canadian achievements in film – horror and otherwise – at every level, warts and all.

Even given the book's many sad indictments of the Canadian film industry, one is left with the impression that Vatnsdal is cautiously optimistic about the future of the Canadian horror movie as both an art form and a commodity.

"I'm an optimistic person by nature," he maintains, "and I myself plan to be a part of that future, so how could I not be optimistic about it?"

Obviously the attitudes have changed somewhat since the mid-'70s, and I think the time is ripe for this critical open-mindedness and the general need for commercial yet Canadian films to combine, and start producing good, horror movies for us all to enjoy." ☺



HALLOWEEN

"THE NIGHT HE CAME HOME"

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25 years after the original *Friday the 13th*, creator SEAN CUNNINGHAM comes clean about Mario Kassar, Paramount Pictures and his true feelings about the monster he created: JASON VOORHEES

RETURN TO CAMP BLOOD

by Calum Waddell

EST. 193

For the record, the *Friday the 13th* franchise has got to be one of the most retarded series to ever happen in the horror genre. But we love them! Say what you will, *Friday the 13th* represents the mainstream breakthrough of the bloodsoaked, deliberately exploitive vision that H.G. Lewis pioneered back in '61. Yes, we love the stuff, and as long as that shunned yet beloved bastard son Jason Voorhees keeps cutting people in half, we'll keep watching.

Perhaps that might explain why, eleven movies on, *Friday the 13th* shows no signs of coming to a conclusion. Oh sure, they've tried to end the franchise... twice. 1984 saw Joseph Zito's superior *Friday the 13th: The Final Chapter*, and Jason turned into killer-kebab by a machete-wielding Corey Feldman. Almost a decade later, original director Sean Cunningham returned to the series to produce 1993's *Jason Goes to Hell: The Final Friday*. Of course, it was not to be – and a ludicrous closing shot even set up *Freddy Vs. Jason* ten years later.

What this teaches us, of course, is that the word "final" doesn't really hold true to its dictionary meaning as far as horror movie sequels are concerned (see also: *Freddy's Dead: The Final Nightmare* and *Puppet Master 5: The Final Chapter*, – we

"WHEN *FREDDY VS. JASON* OPENED, ANYBODY WHO OWNED A FRANCHISE CHARACTER WAS RUNNING AROUND LIKE DON KING TRYING TO MATCH THEM UP." SEAN CUNNINGHAM



say that only to illustrate a point, not to actually recommend these pictures for viewing). It also demonstrates the lasting allure of "an anonymous thug in a hockey mask with a machete", as critic Kim Newman so eloquently described Jason in *The Aurum Film Encyclopedia of Horror*, although it's tricky to pinpoint exactly what that "allure" actually is.

Certainly it is difficult to look to Sean Cunningham for the answer as to why Jason remains such a pop culture icon. Cunningham directed the original *Friday the 13th* (1980), an effective "murder-mystery" that introduced the world to Betsy Palmer as the psychotic Mrs. Voorhees, her killing spree brought to an end when she is decapitated by one of her adversaries. Jason only made a cameo appearance in the movie's effectively staged final shock sequence, clearly influenced by a similar fake coda from Brian DePalma's *Carrie*.

Following this surprising sleeper hit, which was likely inspired by the success of John Carpenter's *Halloween* and notoriously rumoured to be cribbed from Mario Bava's iconic Euro-slasher *Twitch of the Death Nerve* (1971), Cunningham bowed out and left the next two sequels to Steve Miner, who had been the assistant director on the first movie.

A noted connoisseur of the genre, Miner's *Friday the 13th Part 2* actually restages scenes from Bava's film, perhaps indicating that inspiration was thin even back in these early installments. Nevertheless, each *Friday* film was a box office hit, until the law of diminishing returns finally encouraged Paramount to rid itself of the series after 1989's encouragingly titled, but poorly constructed, *Jason Takes Manhattan* (affectionately referred to by the *Rue Morgue* editors as *Jason Takes a Boat Ride*). Of course, by the late '80s the slasher boom as a whole

had shot its wad, and the days of seeing lifeless knockoffs such as *The Burning*, *Hell Night* and *Pieces* spinning a profit at your local picture house were long gone.

Jason, as a contemporary monster, à la Boris Karloff's Frankenstein monster or Lon Chaney's Wolf Man, is a difficult equation to make – largely because Mr. Voorhees has little personality outside of his trademark hockey mask and array of inventive weapons. Moreover, the ever-changing rules of the *Friday the 13th* franchise have made the character's legacy virtually nonsensical. Is he some kind of unexplained wild man with superhuman strength (*Part 2, 3 and 4*)? A reincarnated zombie slasher from hell (*Parts 6 and 7*)? A ghost (*Parts 1, 8 and 9*)? An indestructible... thing (*Jason X*)? It's difficult to know if even Sean Cunningham is sure.

However, what the *Friday the 13th* legacy does offer up is a series of movies that are never dull. Each director – and make no mistake about it, Cunningham's original remains the best of the lot – offers the viewer at least a few nicely executed special effects, jumps and ludicrous plot twists. Unlike, say, the *Halloween* series – which has tried to remain true to logic even in spite of itself and ended up somewhat of a mess – *Friday the 13th* is hard to take seriously. But that's what we've come to love about the series. Like the best popcorn movies, the Jason franchise holds a special place in the hearts of those of us who grew up with his cheerfully madcap and decidedly messy adventures. Long may he stalk the woods of Camp Crystal Lake!

Rue Morgue recently sat down with original *Friday* director Sean Cunningham for an intimate chat about the history of the series on the eve of Paramount's 25th anniversary box set release (see pg. 35).

Do you want to go on the record about the so-called influence of Mario Bava's *Twitch of the Death Nerve* on *Friday the 13th*? Did you ever see this film?

No, I never saw it and, somebody else asked me about this – it wasn't until years later. The first time I ever heard Bava's name was when I went to a film festival in 1986/87, that's where I first met Stuart Gordon and saw *Re-Animator*. But I was not aware of horror films even in the United States! I knew that Hammer made some movies, but the idea of Spanish or Italian or Japanese horror films, I mean, I didn't know anything about it.

What about *Halloween*, was that a big influence when you were making *Friday the 13th*?

No, it wasn't a big influence, but *Halloween* I was certainly aware of. It was something that I noticed because it was such a low-rent film but so effective even though it didn't seem to have the trappings of most movies. I didn't think of *Halloween* when we were making [*Friday*], we were trying to come up with something else. There was no precedent for what we were doing. All we were trying to do was to make a small movie that might find a small audience, and if we could do it well enough, then I'd [be able to] go back to my TV series. It got finished, moved over to Paramount and Frank Mancuso [producer of several *Friday* films] released it. We had unknown writers, unknown stars – nothing – just the title, *Friday the 13th*, and the trailer.

Audiences loved *Friday the 13th*, and flocked to see it, but critics hated it. Did this surprise you?

It didn't surprise me. I didn't like film criticism anyway, because of what I'd discovered through



the ten years previous when I saw a lot of movies, and I learned to like movies. I wanted to see how they worked on me, how they made me feel. But [critics] generally criticized the fact that filmmakers didn't make the movie that reviewers wanted to see. Therefore, the filmmaker fucked up and that never made any sense to me. It was not about what the filmmaker said, it was about what the filmmaker *should* have said. I think that characteristically, film criticism – and I don't know if this is true of all film criticism – but highbrow film critics, by and large, tend to respond to much more cerebral films that approach their material, that are sort of more verbal. And what they really hate is when their emotions get engaged. It's okay to engage a critic's intellect, but not their emotions. If you engage their emotions, then you are guilty of the worst crime of all, which is to say that you are being manipulative! Hello? If you're doing your job then you *are* manipulating! And if you understand the medium, you're really trying to say things non-verbally and engage the emotions. The spoken word is a wonderful addition to a well told story, but people want to have their emotions engaged, that is why they're paying ten dollars, they don't want to sit there and be lectured to or have their intellect challenged. You're meant to *feel* something, to laugh, to cry, to be scared, to be transported or to be enthralled. You use the sound and the music and the story and the interest to manipulate the audience, hopefully in the service of telling the



story. Critics, by and large, don't tend to like that kind of storytelling, they want to see something else. *Friday the 13th* was only about manipulation, it's much more like....

—a series of well-timed jolts?

Yeah, it's like a fairy tale. When I was starting to look at making children's films earlier, the story that I had been fascinated with telling was Hansel and Gretel, which is about a mother and a father, they don't have enough food so they take the children out to the woods and leave them to starve to death so that the mother and father will have more to eat. That's how it starts, and it gets worse from there! So I lay out Hansel and Gretel and do the screenplay and people read this and go, "I don't think children should see this, this is awful, this is vile, and it's cruel and so ugly." I was scratching my head, because it was all of those

things but then you ask yourself, "well, it's a children's story that's been told for hundreds of years. What's up with that?" There's a wonderful book called *The Uses of Enchantment* by Bruno Bettelheim, and he addresses the issue of fairy tales as stories told to children. What do they do?

Why do they keep coming back and why do they need to be told over and over again? The underlying assumption is that all of us have fears that we stuff away. By and large, we need some mechanism to deal with the things that we are afraid of. And what fairy tales do is, in the safety of "Once Upon a Time", you get to look at situations and things that are scary to you, but in the comfort of your

bedroom whilst your mother is reading it to you. You get to take it out of the closet and look at this monster from a completely different direction and then you put it back away, and it's not quite so scary. Then you do that again and again and that's how you deal with fears that you can't verbalize as a kid but which are there. And with *Friday the 13th*, we thought, what's a scary movie? Well, it was the fear of untimely death, because when you're a teenager, imagine if you went to school and someone you knew or saw yesterday had died over the weekend, ran a motorcycle off into a tree or something. You and all your friends would be in shock, we think we are invulnerable to that.

There's the age-old comment that the kids in Friday the 13th are being punished because they are having sex or smoking dope. Do you agree with this?

Well I never believed in that but other people have chosen to see that in it. It speaks about the potential propaganda value of the media. All advertising is propaganda. You, as a kid, have been told that sex equals death whether it's a priest or a nun or your mother or whatever, and sure as shit the kids start fucking and they die. I guess that's true, or more to the point, "These kids are fucking, I'm in a horror movie, I've been told sex equals death, I think they're in a lot of trouble." But I never believed in that sort of reality in a horror movie.

Was Paramount really embarrassed to be making the Friday the 13th films?

I know that Paramount was embarrassed by *Friday the 13th*, not at the super corporate level, but the creative filmmakers just hated it, because these were lowbrow, trashy movies. And proud of it! Meanwhile they're trying to do

Paramount releases the ultimate Friday the 13th DVD box set. Or is it?

JASON UNLEASHED... SORT OF

by Jen Vuckovic



First things first: I have to say that I love rotting corpses who fold the living like lawnchairs, and I'm assuming the rest of you do too. And no matter how brainless that kind of entertainment is, Jason Voorhees has always done it with style – and looked cool doing it! On October 5th, Paramount's 25th anniversary issue of the masked head's better appearances in the eagerly anticipated box set *Friday the 13th: From Crystal Lake to Manhattan* and, at first glance, the set looks pretty damn swanky. But pull out an eye and look closer, Jason junkies: further inspection reveals that, as usual, the people over at Camp Crystal Lake just aren't thinking.

Containing one of the most successful mainstream horror franchises in film history (that's a fact), this box set is a total letdown. Apparently, Paramount (who used to own the rights to the series until they sold it back to Sean Cunningham after *Part VII* – see pg. 32 for the dirt on that) was always uneasy about the series, even though all the bloodletting made them a ton of money over the years. Their 25-year anniversary release – which includes parts one through eight, natch – pretty much sums up their attitude:

First major list to the ghoulies: *From Crystal Lake to Manhattan* almost completely excludes

extra features on the first (and arguably the best) four installments. Adding insult to groin injury, I can't fathom why on earth the deleted scenes haven't been restored into the films themselves, thereby making them unrated versions of unbridled, machete-wielding grisly glory – what everyone was hoping for.


Man, am I ever glad I'm not one those poor schmoees who sold their collection of imported uncut releases on Ebay waiting for Paramount's promise of petulance. Let's face it, we don't watch these films for their intellectual and artistic value – we watch them for the fucking gore! To not include the uncut version of the original *Friday* is inexcusable, especially since it's been available for some time overseas, and even the currently available versions of *The Final Chapter* (the favourite of many) and *Jason Goes to Hell* are unrated, for cripes sake!

What's even worse is that the powers that be decided to cram all eight films onto four discs. I don't think it was too much to ask that each *Friday* get its own disc with extra features, maybe

like the New Line *Nightmare* box set. And maybe I'm anal as hell about this, but I hate double-sided discs, they scream "cheap ass," to me. While I'm at it, *Part 3* in 3-D would also have been a nice touch, and there's no way Paramount didn't have the clams to make that happen. But the biggest kick in the teeth about all this is that most of us will be compelled to buy it anyway, because horror fans are the most loyal sickos in the world next to those abhorrent *Star Trek* freaks.

Yes, there are a few cool featurettes, notably *The Friday the 13th Chronicles* which revisits a handful of the cast and crew, and a behind-the-scenes makeup tidbit called *Galore Behind The Gore* with Tom Savini and Carl Buechler, which is a nice touch. But hands down the most promising thing about this set is *Friday the 13th: The Bracke's commentary on Part 3* which anticipates his upcoming book *Crystal Lake Memories: 25 Years of Friday the 13th from Crystal Lake to Manhattan*. We'd tell you to save your dough for two copies of the book instead if we didn't love that masked mongoloid zombie so much. **B-**





the sequel to *Chinatown*. It was sort of like this little cash cow that kept coming around every year or two. Now the distributor guys, they had no problem with it, they could always book it, collect money and do their job well. But when all the people connected with the original *Friday the 13th* series left – Frank Mancuso left and I guess his son left as well – there was nobody left from that era. Paramount thought that there was not much more left in [the series], and to hell with it. At that point in time I was able to get the rights back and move it along to New Line.

Do you regret losing the rights to it for so many years?

Oh no, not at all.

How don't wish you had done the sequels yourself?

Well, it would have been much better business sense doing the sequels myself and knowing now what I didn't know then, sure! But I didn't know, and I'm not sure I have ever learned how to make movies from the sidelines. And with *Friday the 13th*, they were making the same movie over and over again. Why would I want to do that? There were lots of good reasons, but I just didn't know them at the time, and the truth is I didn't want to keep making this movie over and over again, there were lots of other things I wanted to try. No doubt, I could have made a lot more money if I had done it but I guess everything I did was driven by the desire and need to feed my family and be responsible.

For a long time now there's been this still picture printed in magazines of the very first female camper with a machete through her neck. It's a very gory picture; did you ever shoot this scene?

I don't think so, are you talking about the campers that got caught out?

Yeah, in the prologue to the film. The girl had a machete through her neck in the still picture.

Oh yeah, that wasn't the camper, that was the girl who got out of the truck and ran into the woods – that scene.

No, no, this was of the blonde girl. She's even wearing the Camp Crystal Lake T-shirt in the picture. It's led to a lot of speculation about whether there is a more gruesome opening scene.

[Pauses] No, I don't think there is. At that point, also with the budget I had, I had to be very selective with what I was going to put on the camera. And there is nothing that I didn't plan to use, or use at some point. There wasn't a much gorier scene.

I thought when you came back to produce Jason Goes to Hell and Jason X, the Friday the 13th series became very tongue-in-cheek.

They were a little bit and also, I was relieved from the burden of directing.

You don't have any desire to direct anymore?

Well as a producer you're involved in it, but the energy is just totally different. But producing, you still end up putting in a bunch of time and you can inspire yourself to still care, and try to make it as good as you can.

Are you pleased with how Jason X came out?

Well let me put it this way. I never liked anything I made. I still think there are a couple of really good movies in me but I just haven't been able to make them. I just haven't figured out how to do it. That's what I do in the morning, try to figure out, "Alright, yeah, we did that and it didn't work, and we did that and it didn't work, so now what can we do?" I'm at a point in my life where I have very strong ideas about how I would try and accomplish the story I would like to tell, but it's hard.

And the future of the Friday the 13th franchise is with Jason Vs. Freddy Vs. Ash, is that correct?

I don't know, we might. I don't think that *Freddy Vs. Jason Part 2* is going to happen as that. I just don't think there's enough meat on the bones, but I think the notion of using Freddy and Jason in another sort of WWF cage match kind of thing is a good idea. I think the idea of using Ash solves a whole bunch of story problems. Of the different things that have been pitched, that is absolutely one of the best notions, but it's miles and miles from a notion to being something that you'll want to spend \$75 million on. You know, \$75 million is a lot of money.

So are we going to keep seeing new characters thrown into the mix? New Line also owns Leatherface, and the new Texas Chainsaw Massacre has been a huge hit. Will there be no end to it?

Obviously we've been talking about a lot of stuff, you know. More or less when *Freddy Vs. Jason* opened, anybody who owned a franchise character was running around like Don King trying to match them up.

Can you tell me anything about the Crystal Lake Chronicles, the proposed Friday the 13th television series?

Oh that's all with Geoff [Garrett]. The idea is that you have a bunch of kids in coming of age situations, sort of like *Smallville* or others, and it's tied together with some history in the town about Jason. Somebody called it Jason's Creek [laughs], but we're actually calling it *Crystal Lake Chronicles*. It's a *Dawson's Creek* crossover with an edge, and the supernatural.

How will you approach Jason, because we never really know what he is – a ghost, a zombie, some superhuman being?

Well Geoff can tell you more about that, but essentially there is a continuing villain in the town, who is connected to the history of Jason and who has his own sort of negative agenda. So he's the puppet master within the town and he has stuff to do with Jason and stuff to do with the family, but he is a brand-new character. So, we're able to reference and have access to the tradition of the series and the stuff you don't know about. But nevertheless you have material that is about learning to grow up in today's world which is what all of the successful films thrive on.

Will we learn the truth about Jason?

Will we? Tune in! ☺



The Ripper.



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This Halloween, DC launches Toe Tags, a multi-issue comic series written by the genre's top talent beginning with **GEORGE ROMERO**, who takes his zombie vision between the panels for the first time.



NIGHT OF THE FLESH-EATING COMICS

by **GARY BUTLER**

George Romero isn't dead — hell, given his fascination with the mortally challenged aside, the man isn't even sick. But he's certainly the first kid on the block to personalize his own set of toe tags without having to first be laid out on a slab in an embalmer's basement.

Toe Tags is a new horror comic series appropriately launching just in time for Halloween. It's the brainchild of DC Comics editor Bob Schreck, who recently brought the company's Batman books back to the tough-guy trenches. Similar to series like *Batman: Legends of the Dark Knight* and *Splinter-Man's Tangled Web*, the Toe Tags project features multi-issue, finite plotlines by different writer/artist teams, its unique distinction being that each individual story arc is developed and scripted by an established horror filmmaker. The establishment's first representative is, of course, the aforementioned legendary zombie auteur.

"Writing horror comics has never been a goal, per se, but the experience has been — what's a good 'living dead' kind of term? — ah: rejuvenating," says a jovial Romero, phoning in from the middle of a family vacation in New Jersey. "Well, you see, there are plenty of dead people here," he explains in an arch whisper — a real 'they're coming to get you, Barbra' moment.

Romero recalls: "Bob Schreck phoned me pretty much out of the blue, and told me that he wanted to do a series of horror comics by filmmakers. Before he even finished his pitch, I said yes."

And when George Romero says yes, he means it in the immediate sense of the word. Renowned for his enthusiasm when a project really seems to "have legs, even zombie ones", he took less than two months to write and submit the scripts for five full issues of his all-original undead story, *The Death of Death*, earning him Toe Tags' premiere arc. The sixth and final issue was developed in a discussion between Romero, Schreck and a few other DC insiders.

"I came to them with a list of possibilities," he explains, "and we collectively determined which conclusion would be the most effective."

It's no surprise to learn that *The Death of Death* is set in a zombie apocalypse — after all, this is a Romero story. The real surprise is that it's not set in Romero's living dead film universe, comprised of the famous works *Night of the Living Dead*, *Dawn of the Dead*, *Day of the Dead*, and now, *Land of the Dead*, currently in pre-production.

"*The Death of Death* is its own beast and it follows its own rules," Romero promises, "though there's certainly no shortage of [filmic] similarities."

Communal qualities include the requisite in medias res apocalypse, mindless living dead denizens that lurch, lumber and lust for flesh, and darkly humorous socio-political metaphors (including, later in the story, some greedy corporate hacks named Bush, Cheney and Rice — assuming, says Romero, "that DC was bold enough to leave those names in.").

As for what's different, well, how about a zombie slayer who's half-zombie himself? Truth be told, that last part sounds a little bit *RoboCop* and a little bit *Blade*, and maybe a little bit *Dead Heat*. Plus, isn't zombieism an all-or-nothing kind of deal?

"That's the new question, isn't it?" Romero laughs, deftly identifying the reason why this story necessarily establishes its own continuity. "On one level, the [living dead] movie universe is about pure, unadulterated horror, but it's really about humanity's failure to relate; lack of communication invokes social problems, and as society tears itself apart, it allows insurgents to take over. This comic, on the other hand, has provided me with an outlet to tell a different, slightly lighter kind of story, more fun, less negative. It's just as gory and horrific as anything I've done on film, though — in fact — it's arguably gorier because there's no FX budget, so there are truly no limits."

Toe Tags' first issue alone lives up to Romero's intimations. On the slightly lighter side, two star-crossed lovers find themselves hopelessly separated in a city teeming with zombies, until one of them comes up with a unique solution to stamp out the competition, or at least trample right over it. (Suffice to say that while some horror stories go to town, this one goes to the zoo.)

And if gore's your order, the stuff's omnipresent. Though the issue culminates with the savaged and infected hero-to-be meeting his fate in the form of a radical scientist with some fresh ideas, the highlight is an explosive, multi-page zombie massacre that moves the full distance from the bottom to the top of a compromised office building stairwell.

Bearing in mind that Romero has spent more than three decades getting into zombies' heads, it makes sense that the man would develop some ideas that simply don't gel with the universe of his *Dead* movies — specifically, the notion of someone fighting and possibly beating the "disease" of zombieism.

"At best, this story is nominally interwoven with *Land of the Dead*," Romero says. "I finished the first draft of that script approximately 48 hours before the Twin Towers went down in 2001, and it was rejected everywhere that I sent it, because the post-attack world was naturally all about 'soft and fuzzy.' I decided to sit on it and not revise it, just let some time go by — but I did start to think of 'lighter' zombie and horror ideas that could actually be executed in North America's post-9/11 mindset of living with terrorism."

Hence a justice-delivering monster dispatcher who survived a zombie attack and whose undead-wish is to clean up his city. That said, given that *The Death of Death* features a protagonist with a decidedly cyborg-style look and who sports some beyond-Batman weaponry, is it not fair to suggest that it's a vigilante super-



"This comic [is] just as gory and horrific as anything I've done on film, though — in fact — it's arguably gorier because there's no FX budget, so there are truly no limits." GEORGE ROMERO



The Death of Death: A lighter zombie story.

hero story in zombie's clothing?

"Well, if it is a superhero comic story – and I'm not saying that it is or isn't – it was unintentional," says Romero. "My hero has no superpowers. He's not so much super as just smart, resourceful and moral. He's a deeply conflicted guy trying to do the right thing in a world gone horribly wrong."

Batman's *Night of the Living Dead*, then? Or to put it best, *Dark Knight of the Living Dead*?

"It's certainly a comic-driven type of story," Romero concedes, pointing out that he's much more familiar with the old school pulp comics of his youth than with modern (not to mention post-modern) graphic literature.

"At its heart, the pulps were about a good guy, a bad guy, and oftentimes the mean and rotten world that seems to arbitrarily back the bad guy. The difference is that in my story, there's a dead good guy, a dead bad guy and a world of zombies as well as not-dead bad guys. To me, that's a lot more fun and a lot more interesting."

There's certainly no doubt that Romero had a ball writing the story. The zombie-plagued urban centre is purposely named to facilitate the hilarious graffitied city limits sign that reads "(Rein)Carnation City, population 0." And the hero's name is an intentional study in contrasts.

"Damien Cross," Romero laughs. "There's

nothing profound underlying it, but I guess it's funny that it combines references to both the anti-Christ and the Christ."

Twistedly appropriate, really, for a guy who's not quite dead but not quite undead.

"I call those kinds of details my midnight inspirations – things I come up with when I'm really deep into a project and completely focused on finessing it on as many levels as I can," says Romero.

In other words, the half-zombie zombie slayer and (Rein)Carnation City aren't ideas that Romero's been sitting on for years – they were all custom-created for Toe Tags.

"The villain's name is another original project of my dark sense of humour," he adds, laughing. "It's Attila – Attila the Hungry."

Certainly, humour can carry itself well in a pulp and blood-and-guts-style comic book like this one. Sometimes, though,

wordplay backfires. Case in point: despite a decade or two of media reports to the contrary, the fourth installment in Romero's *Dead* movie series was never seriously going to be called *Twilight of the Dead*.

"*Twilight* was a joke that I made at some convention, I can't remember how many years ago," he reveals. "Sure, it's a catchy title, but I would never, never use it, because it's twilight; it implies that the dead are on their way out."

Until recently, the landmark sequel to *Day of the Dead* did have a different title from the current *Land of the Dead*, when Romero learned that *Dead Reckoning* was also the name of a late 1940s Bogart movie.

"But obviously, I'm used to title changes," he affably admits, referring to *Night of the Flesh Eaters*, his own original title for *Night of the Living Dead*. "The studio shoehorned that change when they learned that there was another movie called *The Flesh Eaters*, and that killed us. They left our copyright mark off of the new print, and we were too young to know any better, or to know that we should make sure that it was there. As a result, that movie is part of the public domain, which means that anyone can use it for anything they want, and none of the people who made it will ever see a penny. It just killed us."

Which seems like a fair opportunity to ask Romero's opinion on the recent resurgence of zombie movies, including the dubious remake of *Dawn of the Dead*.

"I haven't seen *28 Days Later*," he says, "I do make zombie movies, but that doesn't mean that I'm a student of the genre. I saw *Dawn* – I had to. I also saw *Shaun of the Dead*, suffice to say that I liked *Shaun* a lot more. I'm sorry, but I really don't think that zombies should run. The fear that they engender is a paralyzing kind of fear. It's the idea of a lumbering thing relentlessly coming at you," he continues, invoking the neo-classic image of *Halloween*'s Michael Myers stalking Jamie Lee Curtis – stalking by walking. "The tension comes from his will to get her, one way or another. That is ineluctable horror which, for me, is as powerful as it gets."

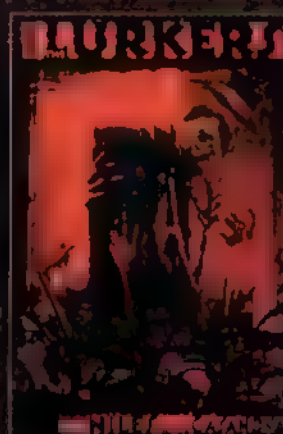
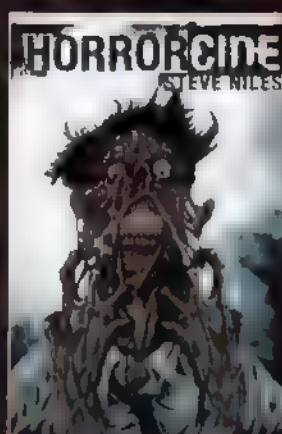
To be fair, *The Death of Death* isn't exactly ineluctable horror, but it's definitely ineluctable fun. And, intentionally or not (likelier the latter), it's very much the "What if?" or "Elseworlds" of Romero's lifelong work. "It gave me an opportunity to examine what I do from a completely different point of view," he agrees. "This is something that every creative person needs to do regularly and yet so rarely manages."

So can we expect more tags on Romero's toes in the future?

"Assuming that Bob Schreck calls to ask me back, I'll say yes before he can finish the sentence again," he laughs. "But I wouldn't do zombies. I'd do something very different; I have lots of ideas kicking around based on my old movie scripts. There's one where – you know when you're a kid, and you look at the clouds and you see maybe a camel or a lion? What if you were looking at the moon instead, and what if something made those moonshadows come to life? I think that could make a really good one."

Note to Bob Schreck: forget all those other horror filmmakers you have lined up for Toe Tags and give Romero the series. The man's a kid in a candy store... set him loose! ☺





SINCE THE LUNATIC LOWBROW ART OF XNO, THE DEFINITIVE MASTER OF MONSTER ART.

MONSTERS FROM THE VAULT



by Joe Pickett



"The Frankenstein monster is a symbol of resurrection through science. It's a pretty horrible image, but it's still a cartoon." -XNO

If space zombies, buxom bat girls, mad scientists, Martiansteins and drooling ghouls turn your visual crank, then feast your eyes upon the brazen brush strokes of XNO. Born Chet Darmstaedter, XNO cut his teeth on the likes of *Milton the Monster*, Frankenberry cereal, the Haunted Mansion and *Creepy* magazine, prior to firing up his own self-published 'zines in 1983. He has since become something of a lowbrow art phenomenon, having been featured in well-respected galleries like the Bess Cutler in New York and La Luz de Jesus in LA, alongside artists like The Pizz, Joe Coleman (*RM# 40*), Mark Ryden (*RM# 38*), and Todd Schorr – all of whom employ fine art techniques to create their surrealist "lowbrow" masterpieces. XNO's hyper-detailed, outrageous paintings owe a debt to Frank Frazetta, Jack (Tales From the Crypt) Davis, the spaghetti and meatball style of comic artist Basil Wolverton, and Robert Williams (*Juxtapoz* magazine founder, considered the father of lowbrow), among others.

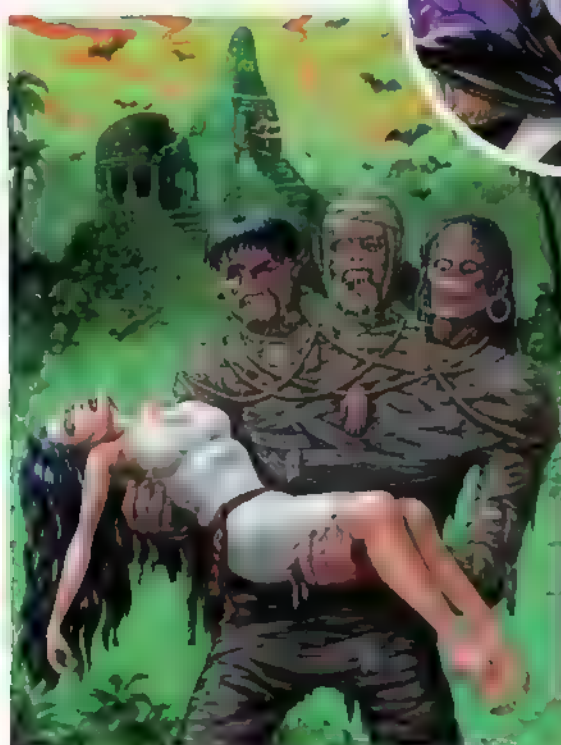
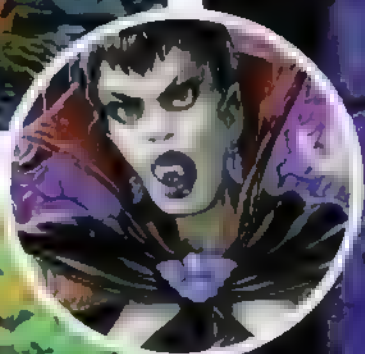
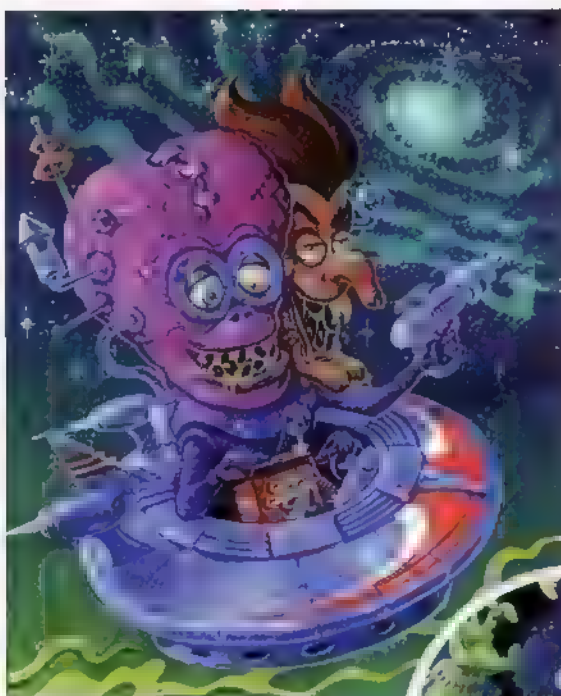
Not surprisingly, XNO's creations have visited all manner of alternative art, from punk records and skateboard art to bubble gum cards, 3D monster comics and even X-rated illustrations for *Hustler* magazine, before settling into their very own bizarre brand of ritualized horror images made cute by their cartoony look. XNO's acrylic paintings are a grotesque mega-study in pop culture; an explosion of brash, lurid colour, swollen with the childhood memories of a diehard horror fan.

These weird and wicked renderings – many of them a variation of the Boris Karloff Frankenstein monster – come off as a parade of psychotic visuals that range from amusing and disturbed to X-rated and absurd. From the Gruesomes to EC Comics' Cryptkeeper, XNO renders them all in voluptuous, radioactive colours that virtually leap out at you from the canvas. No matter what he decides to paint, you can be sure it'll be a mad, mad monster party that we all want an invite to!

XNO art and limited edition prints are available at www.lowbrowartworld.com ☼



OPPOSITE PAGE (CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT): Thirsty, Cursing the Monster, and (big picture) Cover #13 created for the cover of *Horror From the Crypt of Fear*, issue #13. THIS PAGE (CLOCKWISE FROM TOP): Beat On The Bat, Haunted Mansion and Martianstein.



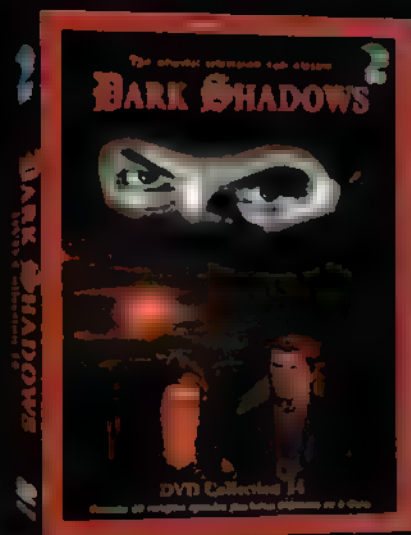
CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Serial Duo In Space, The Bride, Three Headed Mummy, Tricks For Treats. INSETS: Frankenpop Rampage, The Vamp.

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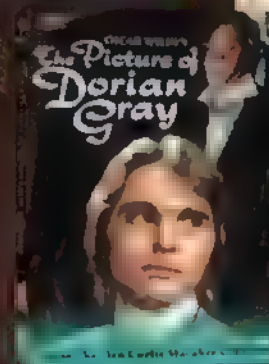
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A religion based on Ed Wood? Don't laugh, this is serious business. And after you read this article, you may be surprised at how much you may have in common with...

THE CHURCH OF THE HEAVENLY WOOD



by Stuart Andrews

It's not easy to convince people to take you seriously when you're the founder of a religion that exists only on the internet. Steve Galindo from Sacramento, California knows this cruel fact of life all too well.

"It's difficult," he tells *Rue Morgue*, "because for every one religion that's serious, you get ten Church of SpongeBob SquarePants and William Shatner religions that are a complete joke."

These are surprisingly strong words when you take into account that Reverend Steve (as he's known to his congregation) is the Pope and founder of The Church of the Heavenly Wood, an alternative faith devoted to the worship of the notoriously inept filmmaker, Edward D. Wood Jr., a man who, from a strictly artisan comparison, makes William Shatner look like Marlon Brando.

"We don't consider him to be the Saviour," explains Reverend Steve, "but he is a saviour and by looking to Ed Wood and his films and his life, we hope to better ourselves."

Created in 1996 and still going strong, Woodism (as he calls it) boasts over 3,000 legally baptized followers from all around the world with unusually strong numbers in Italy, Germany and Mexico (insert your own sociological theories here). But don't be fooled. These Woodites are 100 percent serious. To the Woodian faithful,

the Church of the Heavenly Wood is a place to evoke the same sort of embarrassing splutters and messy sobs that Mel Gibson's recent *WWII*-inspired splatterfest induces in many a fundamentalist Christian. For helping to spread the word of Wood, Burton himself has been canonized as a bona fide Saint of Woodism. When asked if the bedraggled director was aware of

this great honour, the Reverend says, "Yes, he seemed vaguely excited about it and possibly a little bit scared."

So why the hell would anyone choose to base an entire religion around such an infamously inept filmmaker anyway?

"Ed Wood had a Libertarian punk sort of quality to him," explains the Reverend, "he was a very independent person. You know, it took a lot of guts and testicular fortitude to be an alcoholic transvestite filmmaker in the '50's and '60s making the type of movies that he did. I consider him to be a success through failure. He was probably the most successful failure in mankind because he kept getting knocked down and his films kept making no money and he kept having his heart broken by Hollywood but he still continued to do what his dream was. In our religion, he's representative of the perseverance of the human spirit. If you stay strong, and you're optimistic, you can overcome all obstacles."

After talking to the Reverend for some time, it becomes increasingly clear that Woodians don't watch Ed Wood's films the way the rest of us do. They look beyond the spaceships that dangle on strings and the cardboard tombstones that wobble in the wind, to gaze upon the very soul of the filmmaker, and through him, come to know the

loving, merciful grace of the Almighty himself. To the enlightened few, *Plan 9 From Outer Space* is not the worst atrocity ever perpetrated on the art of narrative cinema (as it is so widely and unjustly hailed), it is a deeply philosophical cinematic sermon, loaded with spiritual wisdom and prophetic warnings.

"Ed's films have heart to them," preaches the Reverend. "His films have a genuine honest-to-Wood love for movies that you don't see much of

in today's computer dependent Hollywood. It's really easy to focus on the internet film flubs and laugh but *Plan 9* is about peace-loving aliens who get destroyed by the evil American government."

Of course, every great religion has to have an end of the world scenario and Woodism is no exception. With the Amazing Criswell (or Saint Criswell as he's known to the Woodian faithful), the Church of the Heavenly Wood has its very own Saint John the Apostle. One of Wood's stable of regular stars, Criswell was noted for his incredible psychic abilities; after

all, this was the man responsible for uttering the prophecy in *Plan 9 From Outer Space*: "Future events such as these will affect YOU in the future!"

Criswell predicted that the world would come to an end on exactly August 18, 1999 and because his predictions are apparently almost



"BY LOOKING TO ED WOOD AND HIS FILMS AND HIS LIFE, WE HOPE TO BETTER OURSELVES."

-REVEREND STEVE GALINDO

always correct, in 1997 the Church of the Heavenly Wood officially announced this doomsday date to the entire world. Of course, if you're anything like me, you're no doubt shocked and amazed to look out the window to find that the planet is still there, but you'd be very alarmed to learn just how close Criswell's ominous prediction really was.

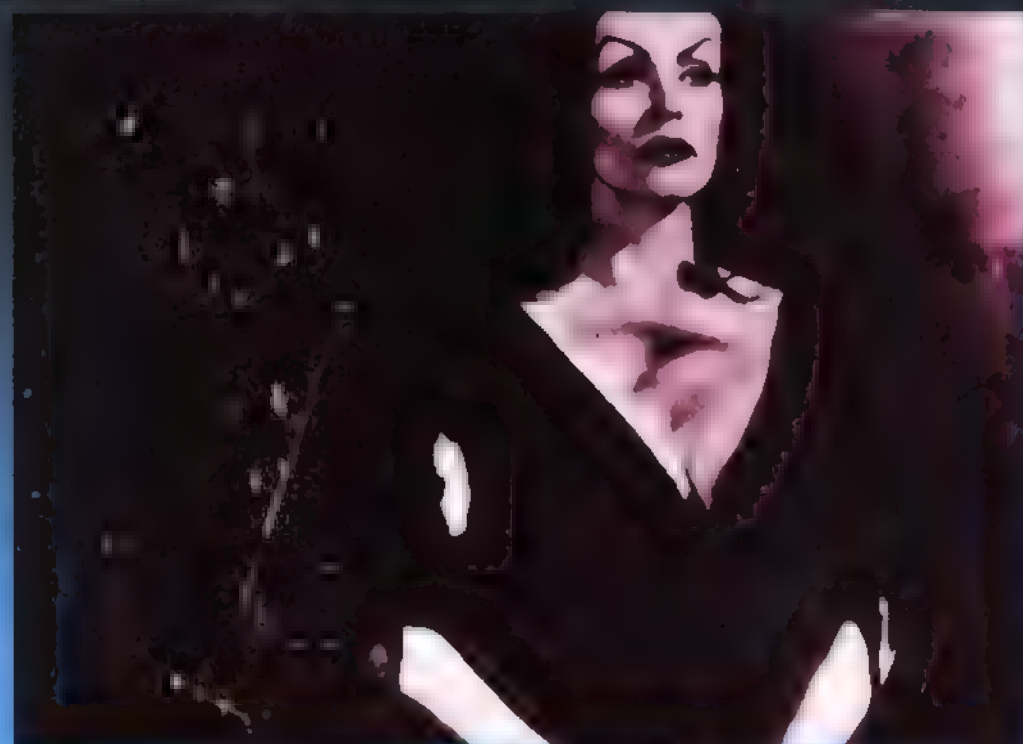
"We found out that there was a space satellite, secretly sponsored by the United States," whispers Reverend Steve, "that was being used to carry hundreds of dangerous, poisonous chemicals through space. It was over Earth and ran into some problems on August 18th and almost crashed onto American soil. It was called the Cassini space vehicle and it actually happened and the world almost came to an end."

Close call! But I guess we can all thank Wood that the Amazing Criswell was only almost a psychic (very much in the same sense that Ed Wood was almost a filmmaker). Having helped alert humanity to what was no doubt an almost imminent global disaster, Woodites all over the planet look to the future with a renewed optimism and enthusiasm not seen since Ed Wood himself stumbled upon his first reel of stock footage. On October 17th of this

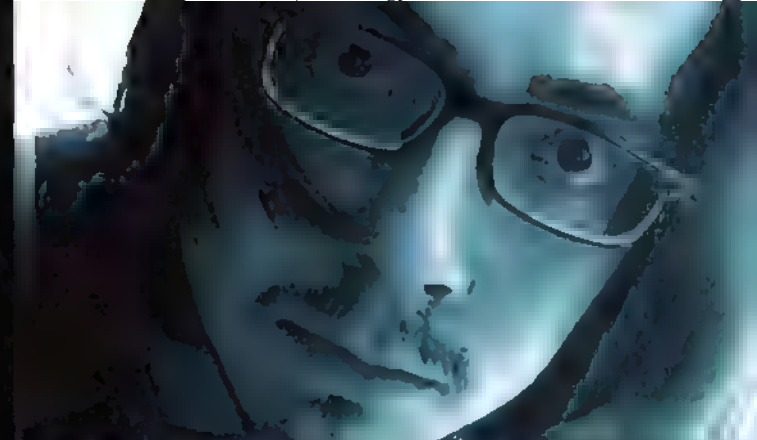
year, exactly one week after Ed Wood's birthday (better known to his believers as Woodmas), throngs of the Woodian faithful will converge in downtown Sacramento, California at the Crest Theatre for a day-long festival of Wood movies, music and live baptisms.

Heathens need not be shy; don't expect to get down there to find a surly band of fundamentalist wackos. Woodites are a friendly, libertarian, peace-loving bunch who accept people from all walks of life and from all religious persuasions. And they don't expect people to believe what they believe, they only want people to respect the fact that they believe it. If you think about it, Woodism may very well be the sanest religion we have! Put it this way: they're not about to wage a holy war with the Shatnertologists, that's for sure.

"We're not saying that Ed Wood is Jesus or that Ed Wood is God," says Reverend Steve. "Ed Wood is just a really wonderful person and we're focusing on his life and, through him, we're finding bits of religion and bits of spirituality to help our own lives. Ed Wood didn't let the reality of the situation that he was in stop him from achieving his dreams, his dream was to make *Plan 9 From Outer Space*, and he did it." ☠



Plan 9 From Outer Space: Vampira gazes on the faithful.



Here it is: the officially sanctioned Church of the Heavenly Wood's Top Five Ed Wood Films as ordained by Reverend Steve!

THE GOSPEL OF WOOD

1. *Plan 9 From Outer Space* (1959)

"*Plan 9* was Wood's pride and joy," says Reverend Steve, "the one film that he was proud of, that he loved more than anything else. You can see it hundreds of times and not realize that the bad guys are the high-headed, quick-to-shoot, evil American police and military and it's actually the aliens who they've been trying to kill who are the good guys."

2. *Glen or Glenda* (1953)

"That's his biography. If you want to know who Ed Wood is, you go for *Glen or Glenda* to know the sorts of things and problems that he went through: the inner workings of his mind."

3. *Orgy of the Dead* (1965)

"*Orgy of the Dead* is kind of painful. The strippers aren't attractive and all the stripteases are incredibly boring. You get to see breasts which is, I guess, a positive but they're not nice breasts and they just kind of gyrate in bizarre motions like they're having some sort of epileptic seizure. But if you just listen to the audio track — the music, the sound effects and the dialogue — it is one of the most beautiful experiences you'll ever have. I used to listen to it a lot when I would go to sleep."

4. *Bride of the Monster* (1955)

"Like every other Ed Wood film, you can make fun of it and you can laugh at it but the dialogue is beautiful. It's dark and the lighting is excellent. If you're an Ed Wood fan and you want to get your girlfriend or your mom into Ed Wood, you start with *Bride of the Monster* 'cuz that's kind of the most commercially viable one."

5. *I Woke Up Early the Day I Died* (1996)

"It was the last full script he wrote and it's completely silent. He wanted to do it but by then he was a raging alcoholic working on porn films, so the film was never made. Billy Zane bought the rights to Ed Wood's script and he did it. It was released in a couple of European countries but never made it to America and never made it onto video. It is beautiful. It is the closest that we will ever get to a new Ed Wood film."

Introducing the **GROOVIE GHOULIES**,
pop punk's happy HORROR BAND.

GHOULIES

Are GO!

by Tasha Brangman



I remember watching my very first honest-to-goodness horror film as an impressionable six-year-old boy visiting a friend who was blessed with cable TV. On the tube was an early '80s slasher called *Curtains*. I had trouble following the story about a murderous porcelain doll, but I'll never forget the strange new mixture of emotions I tucked under my pillow come bedtime, the purity of my youth freshly stained with a keen desire to seek out those stranger circles of life. It felt like an entire universe of crazy new possibilities had opened up and swallowed me whole.

You might say The Groovie Ghoulies are a little like the wide-eyed inner child of a big hairy monster. Weaned on what could only have been a steady diet of *Jabberjaw* cartoons and Boo Berry cereal, the Ghoulies' brand of bubble gum monster-punk owes a musical debt to The Ramones, but their outright affection for the fuzzier face of fear puts them in a place all their own — a place filled with interstellar romance, graveyard girlfriends, B-movies like *Blood Beach* and classic creatures like *Godzilla*.

Having taken their name from an obscure, hokey 1970s cartoon show about a group of Universal monsters turned rock 'n' roll band, what

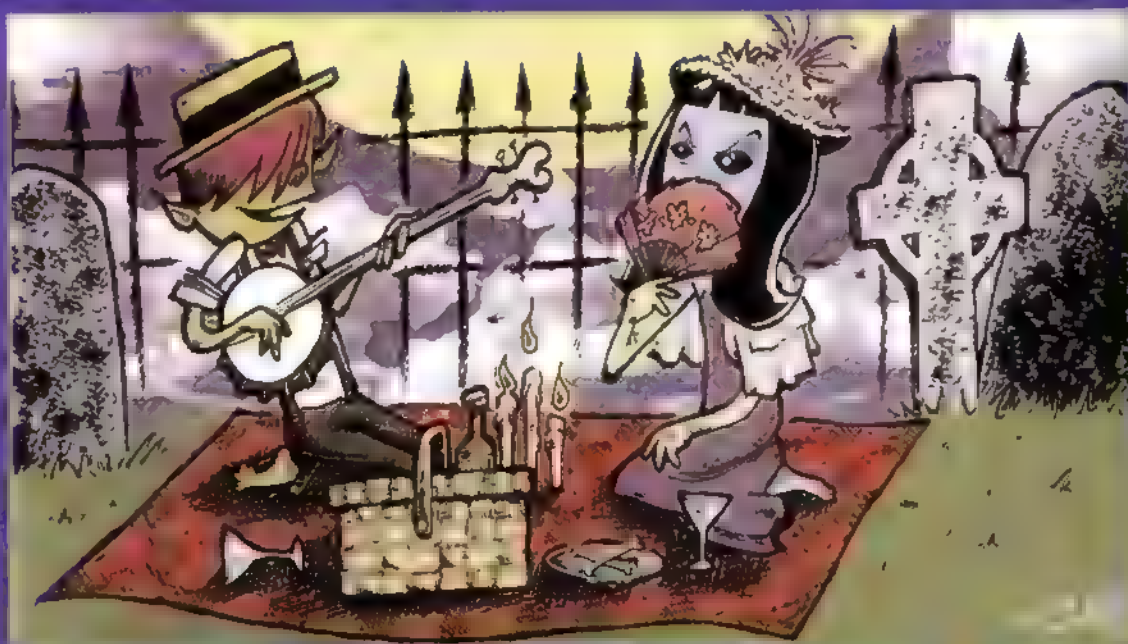
separates these good-natured ghouls from other horror enthusiasts is their utter indifference to the modern blood 'n' guts variety of monsters and madmen, instead saving their three chords for the genre's most enduring archetypes.

"The original *Frankenstein* and *Dracula* books — two of my all-time favorites," says vocalist Kepi who, along with guitarist/wife Roach and drummer Scampi, rounds out the Sacramento, California trio. "My first experience with horror movies was Bay Area fright host Bob Wilkins' *Creature Features* which introduced me to old Universal, Hammer, Tim Burton and Ed Wood."

Naturally, the Ghoulies have a hankering for misunderstood monsters like Bigfoot, King Kong and Pumpkinhead as much as Saturday morning zombies, spaceships and evil computers who say "kill!" Add to that a few kitschy covers from good-time groups like The Mankees, Herman's Hermits and The Partridge Family, and you've just crossed hearts with the Ghoulies' happy horror experience.

"It is still a time for wonderment and amazement," says Kepi reflecting on the genre that keeps the Ghoulies pulsing. "Peter Jackson is remaking *King Kong*, Tim Burton's *Mars Attacks!* was amazing, and Roach and I just watched *The Web!* There is a timelessness to those films just





like there is a timelessness to good rock 'n' roll. Since forming in the mid-'80s, the Ghoules have been touring constantly, something that has cost them several drummers over the years and culminated in an eye-popping tour schedule of run-on dates across the US and Europe, complete with an audience request segment and free candy for the crowd. And the fans love them for it.

"I think we play music for misfits and outcasts, not on purpose, but just because it's not what everybody listens to, it's just what we like," says Kapi. "We can relate to monsters, because monsters don't fit in."

In so much as monsters and lollipops characterize the band, so too does the comic onslaught of smiley Frankenstein faces, jovial space mutants and the evil-yet-cuddly cartoons that adorn their album covers and merchandise. The biggest contributor to the 'look' of Groovie Ghoules would be S. Britt, a Bay Area cartoonist and regular Ghoule contributor since 1996's *World Contact Day*.

"I doodle an idea and then we brainstorm — he really gets the feel of the band," says Kapi. "He has done four full-length covers for us and countless other art."

In fact, Britt (sbritt.com) is only one of a cluster of cool artists to embody the spooky sweet landscape of planet Ghoule. There's also Sam Kieth, creator of *The Maxx* (more recently *Zero Girl* and *Four Women*), Kieth's pal The Poison Pen (1994's

Born in the Basement) and Steven Tipt of Slurmb Records whose Muppets-gone-bad montage graces the cover of 2001's *Freaks on Parade* EP.

Since leaving Lollipop Records for upstart Vamp Springman Records (the California home for "friendly punks" like The Phenomenauts and Secretions), the Groovie Ghoules have bought back their entire catalogue and have put plans into motion for reissuing everything with new packaging and bonus tracks, beginning with 1999's *Fun in the Dark*. The band also have a cameo in the upcoming teenage slasher film *Punk Rock Holocaust*, directed by Troma alumnus Doug Sackman and filmed on location during the 2003 Vans Warped Tour. Targeted for a Halloween DVD release, the movie revolves around a mysterious killer seeking revenge on the tour by systematically slaughtering its crew and performers — the Ghoules, Rancid and Andrew W.K.

And while *Rue Morgue* has heard whispers that the band is also looking into some other film possibilities, Kapi and co. aren't quite ready to crack open that can just yet. For now they're content to do what they've always done: pogo their way across the world to spread the gospel of Halloween.

"We look to the future for more recordings and touring," says Kapi. "I'll also keep busy with my art and screen-printing. All we need is more time... to create and watch movies!"

THE GROOVIE GHOULIES

TOP 5!



1. **SLEEPY HOLLOW**
"One of Tim Burton's finest moments," says Kapi. "Has the best of Burton, Hammer, and a dash of Universal, plus they behead a kid!"

2. **PET SEMATARY**
"One of Roach's all-time favourites. You can't go wrong with Stephen King, the Ramones, Victor, Church and Gage."

3. **NIGHT OF THE LIVING DEAD**

4. **EVIL DEAD**

5. **THE TEXAS CHAINSAW MASSACRE**

"There's a reason these three movies are classics and copied and pinched a thousand times over. They are some of the best ever!"

A GROOVIE DISCOGRAPHY

- 1989 APPETITE FOR ADRENOCHROME
- 1994 BORN IN THE BASEMENT
- 1996 WORLD CONTACT DAY
- 1997 RE-ANIMATION FESTIVAL
- 1997 RUNNING WITH BIGFOOT EP
- 1998 CHRONIC FOR THE TROOPS EP (SPLIT WITH CHIXDIGGIT)
- 1999 FUN IN THE DARK
- 2000 TRAVELS WITH MY AMP
- 2001 FREAKS ON PARADE EP
- 2002 GO! STORIES
- 2004 MONSTER CLUB





THIRTY TROMATIC YEARS

This year, the world's longest-running
anarchic independent film studio celebrates
30 years of perversion and disgust!

BY JOHN W. BOWEN

A blind, hairy, fat man with an unbelievably small penis runs naked through the streets of New York, slips on a banana peel and falls on his ass while an out-of-control car containing two projectile vomiting French film critics does a mid-air roll, lands on the naked man's head, then explodes.

The preceding sequence from *Terror Firmer* clocks in at roughly a minute, and yet it perfectly distills the very essence of Troma — the name now virtually synonymous with super-cheap, fearless and outrageous films. The studio's output has slowly evolved into a category unto itself, to the point where many video stores actually give Troma its own section. While best known for the *Toxic Avenger* film series beginning in 1984, Troma's roots go a lot further back and, as befits their gleefully chaotic repertoire, the whole thing kind of came about by accident.

"I was hoping to become a social worker and teach people with hooks for hands how to finger paint or something like that," future Troma president Lloyd Kaufman recalls in his memoir *All I Need to Know About Filmmaking I Learned From The Toxic Avenger*. Believe it or not, in the '60s, Kaufman was pursuing a degree in Chinese Studies at Yale when, as fate would have it, "God placed me in a dormitory with two cinephiles and fucked my life."

Overnight, the cinematic neophyte developed an obsession with filmmakers as diverse as Preston Sturges, Howard Hawks, Andy Warhol and Charlie Chaplin, and became "a celluloid-hugging Nancy-boy."

Hooking up with future Troma partner Michael Herz, Kaufman began directing low-budget films while working various production jobs on '70s studio fare like *Rocky* and *Saturday Night Fever*. In the '80s, *The Toxic Avenger* became Troma's turning point, a campy, outrageous

"When watching a Troma movie you must not only suspend your disbelief, you must lock it up in a small iron crate and torture it." Lloyd Kaufman

action/sci-fi/horror/comedy about a nerdy, brow-beaten health club janitor who falls into a barrel of toxic waste and becomes a hideously mutated superhero who repeatedly saves Tromaville, New Jersey from the forces of evil.

Now four films deep, the *Toxic Avenger* series is Troma's flagship franchise, and while Kaufman would no doubt cringe at the comparison, he'd never deny that Toxie has become Troma's Mickey Mouse. Many titles in their catalogue are outside productions that the company has picked up for distribution, but the most popular tend to be films Kaufman and Herz have helmed themselves, like *Terror Firmer* and the critically acclaimed fan favourite *Tromeo and Juliet*, an outrageous yet strangely heartfelt spin on the Bard's play replete with kinky sex, violence and car crashes.

"When watching a Troma movie," Kaufman advises, "you must not only suspend your disbelief, you must lock it up in a small iron crate and torture it."

The titles alone bear him out: *Surf Nazis Must Die*, *Buttcrack*, *Femme Fontaine*; *Killer Babe* for the CIA, *Class of Nuke 'Em High*, *Maniac Nurses Find Ecstasy*, *Stuff Stephanie in the Incinerator*, *Space Zombie Bingo*, *Chopper Chicks in Zombietown*. As one might expect, Kaufman in person isn't just a filmmaker, he's an experience ("Tijuana!" he exclaims upon learning of *Rue Morgue* editor-in-chief Rod Gudino's birthplace. "Why, that was the first place I ever fucked a horse!").

In recent years, Troma has also made forays into television and hosted Tromadance, an annual anti-Sundance film festival in Park City, Utah. Kaufman's second book, *Make Your Own Damn Movie!*: *Secrets of a Renegade Director*, was published last year (*RM\$35*). So, how do Kaufman, Herz and their myriad co-conspirators plan to commemorate this anniversary?

"Hopefully survival," Kaufman admits. "We live in an age of devil-worshipping international

media conglomerates who are dead set on killing Troma. So the project is to kill them first."

Kaufman's not exaggerating when he describes Troma as "a cult, an artistic movement", given the willingness of his actors to engage in all manner of outrages on film for very little to no money. In *Terror Firmer*, for instance, wholesome girl-next-door type Alyce Labourelle gets fucked with a pickle, masturbates herself into a frenzy only to be interrupted in mid-orgasm by her phlegm-spewing mother, performs a sex scene in the movie-within-the-movie in front of several dozen people including Joe Franklin, and gets raped by a hermaphroditic serial killer.

"I often have to calm actors down because I'm fearful they'll hurt themselves," Kaufman marvels at the thespian enthusiasm Troma seems to inspire. "Take Will Keenan (star of *Tromeo and Juliet* and *Terror Firmer*) for example. Will wanted to get hit by a car — on purpose — for the Tromadance documentary as a kind of anti-Sundance statement. And I wouldn't let him do it, even though he's a very good athlete."

Troma crews are a similarly fearless and devoted bunch, a quality Kaufman chalks up to a built-in attrition factor.

"We have a very, very long pre-production period for every Troma movie," he explains, "so the rich, spoiled USC film students who want to be George Lucas can leave after a few days when they realize that they've actually got to do some work. And people that remain are just 100 percent devoted to the project. Troma movies are like rockets going up into the sky — the stages fall off and what's left actually goes into orbit."

And despite Troma's steady evolution over the past three decades, Kaufman maintains that the company hasn't changed.

"I really don't think we're doing anything now that we didn't think about doing 30 years ago," he says. "Except that we never

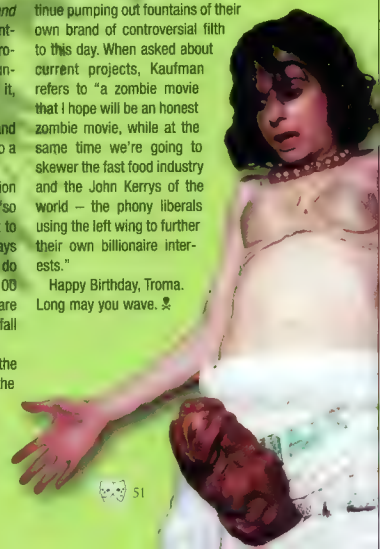
dreamed we'd be like the last man standing. We didn't expect that the industry would evolve into a cartel, a situation where independent cinema is only able to reach the public via divisions of Disney, Warner or Paramount."

The shrill in stature but bigmouthed Troma President adds that when they started out, there were lots of small movie companies, all prospering and creating very original cinema, like John Cassavettes, Andy Warhol, and people in Europe like Jean-Luc Godard.

"There were some very subversive, revolutionary, change-the-world kind of movies being made," he explains. "That's because you could actually get them out to the public and make a profit without having to go through MGM. Those films wouldn't get made today."

But that doesn't stop Troma, who continue pumping out fountains of their own brand of controversial filth to this day. When asked about current projects, Kaufman refers to "a zombie movie that I hope will be an honest zombie movie, while at the same time we're going to skewer the fast food industry and the John Kerrys of the world — the phony liberals using the left wing to further their own billionaire interests."

Happy Birthday, Troma. Long may you wave. ☹



This October marks a first for *Rue Morgue*... an original production for the stage.

Nightmare Picture Theatre

by Vulnavia Wrick

"I've always been fascinated by theatre," remarks Rod Gudino, Rue Morgue President and Editor-in-Chief. "It's not something that gets a lot of attention in the genre, which is partly why I decided it might be something worth exploring."

Gudino is referring to *Nightmare Picture Theatre*, a new show equal parts live music, Expressionist theatre and stop-motion animation cinema set to launch in Toronto, Canada this October as part of *Rue Morgue*'s month-long Halloween festivities in anticipation of the magazine's 7th anniversary *Funeral Fiesta* event on Saturday, October 30.

Best described as a live music multimedia stage show centred on the early twentieth century's interest in the subconscious, existentialism and the macabre, *Nightmare Picture Theatre* is brought to life by the short stop-motion animation films of the Brothers Quay and the live music of composer/actor James Fisher.

"The original idea was to provide an artistic interpretation of these films which have existed since the early 1980s," remarks Gudino. "In doing so, we ended up creating this little Expressionistic universe that hearkens back to the aesthetic of the earliest horror movies."

Set in a dilapidated theatre at the turn of the century, *Nightmare Picture Theatre* follows a strange man who torments a small child into having celluloid nightmares that prefigure the life he has yet to live. The show is complimented by a live score of original synth orchestrations performed by Fisher, who also portrays the show's strange man.

"I've always wanted to do a cover of the Quay shorts because I didn't think that the music properly captured the magic of the films," notes Fisher. "Beyond that though, I was hugely excited to be working on a project that posed so many challenges."

"Bringing together music, drama and film into one cohesive package was definitely a challenge," adds Gudino, "but none were so tough as the movies themselves, which are highly abstract and demanded that we interpret them within some sort of narrative context."

Nightmare Picture Theatre marks the directorial debut for Gudino, who plans on venturing into film for 2005, and the first production for *Rue Morgue*. The original score for the show, also called *Nightmare Picture Theatre*, will be available as the flagship release from Rue Morgue Records, the company's in-house music label which will have a counterpart on the world wide web via Rue Morgue Radio.

Keep an eye out at www.rue-morgue.com for more information on *Nightmare Picture Theatre* and Rue Morgue Records. ☘

Sleepy Hollow

AXE OF THE
HEADLESS HORSEMAN

AVAILABLE SOON



Factory X is proud to present its first replica from Tim Burton's creepy, gothic film Sleepy Hollow – The Axe of the Headless Horseman. Using the prop from the film as reference, the artisans at Factory X have created a frighteningly accurate replica of the Headless Horseman's weapon-of-choice, down to the very last detail. No prop replica collection would be complete without this eerie reminder of the film's creepiest character... Just be sure not to lose your head!

SWORD OF THE
HEADLESS HORSEMAN
COMING LATE 2004



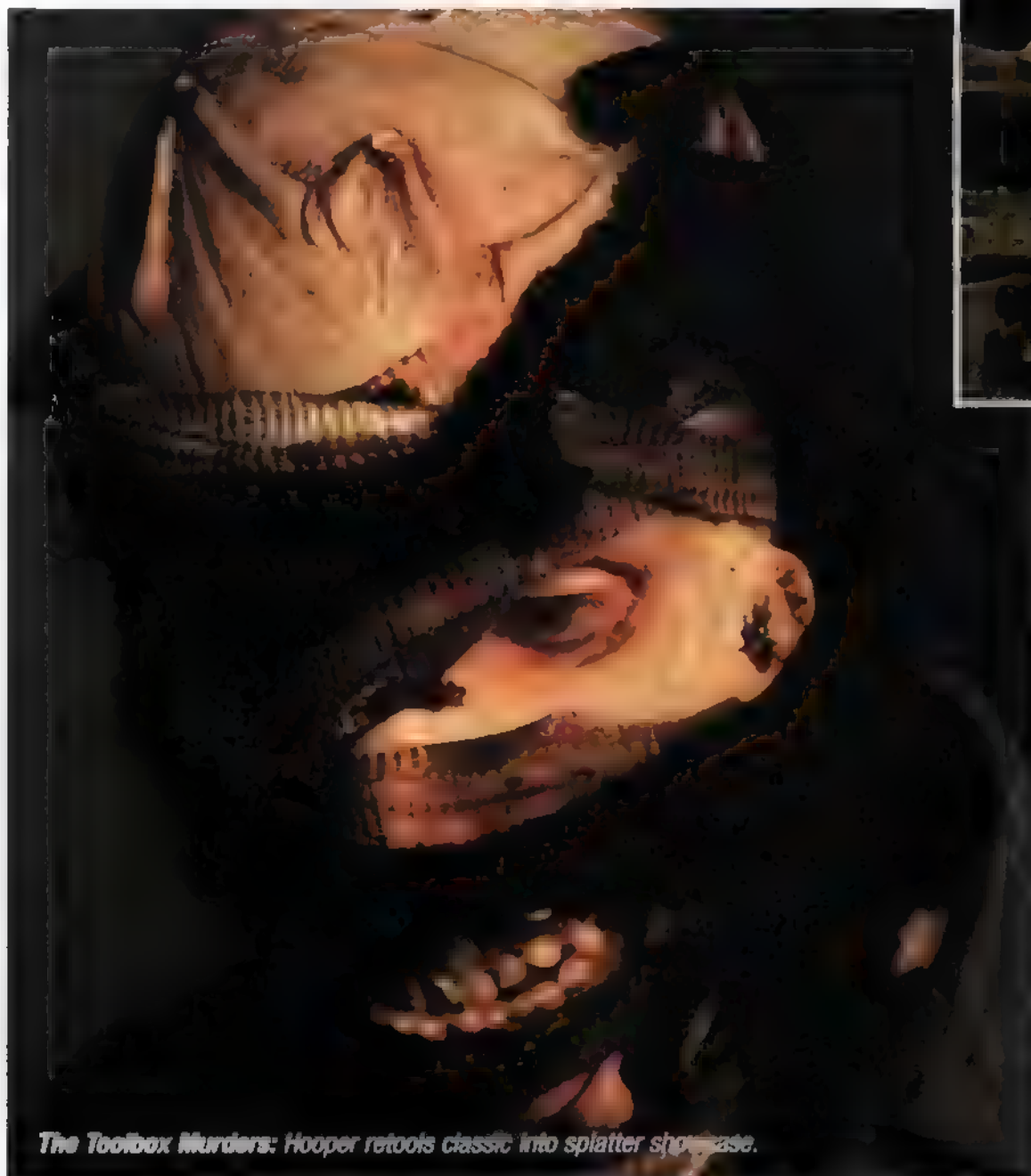
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CINEMACABRE



The Toolbox Murders: Hooper retools classic into splatter showcase.

RETURN OF THE POWER TOOL KILLER

THE TOOLBOX MURDERS

Starring Angela Bettis, Juliet Landau
and Brent Roam

Directed by Tobe Hooper

Written by Jace Anderson and Adam Gierasch
Lions Gate Films

When we heard that Tobe Hooper was remaking *The Toolbox Murders* – re-imagined as a supernatural story no less – we were a little worried. After all, why on earth would Hooper fool around with ghosts if there were power tools at hand? Just didn't

make sense. But then things got interesting: Angela (May) Bettis got the lead part, and word trickled in that the film was living up to the title in grim, Grand Guignol fashion. And, in fact, it does.

The Toolbox Murders is arguably the movie everyone has been waiting for Hooper to make since *Texas Chainsaw Massacre*. There's a love of power tools in these frames – the shrill, mad shriek as they close in for the kill – and a genuine vision for putting them to ill use. The delirious throwback splatter of Hooper's remake is a celebration of the kind of unbounded blood spray that '70s horror flicks are worshipped for.

Written – incredibly – by the same duo who stained Hooper's name with the abom-



inable *Crocodile* (2000), *The Toolbox Murders* tells the tale of Nell (Bettis) who moves into a dilapidated apartment with her husband Steven. The place is a rundown mess, a shadow of its once glorious past as a Hollywood home to the stars. Perpetually lowlit with paper-thin walls and a creepy looking maintenance guy, the place functions as an ominous stage for the ghostly hint of something in the walls and the tangible threat of some sick freak who runs around drilling holes in tenants' heads, nail-gunning a woman to the ceiling and sawing, cutting and butchering with wild, crimson-stained abandon.

Admittedly, there's not much here we haven't seen before, but *The Toolbox Murders* is a movie you'll love precisely because you know what it has in store for you. And what it has is several jump-out-of-your-seat moments, some vicious and delicious kills, a little mystery, a little sex and even a giant table saw. Horror cutie du jour Sheri Moon gets busted up with a hammer real good and the tenants – while painted with very broad strokes – don't lapse into the kind of stupidity that gets audiences counting down the minutes to their deaths.

By the time you get to the movie's awkward denouement, you'll be too wet to care, and the Michael Myers ending will seem oddly appropriate because, deep down inside, you may find yourself secretly believing that *The Toolbox Murders* was actually shot in the '70s and miraculously just got released now. It certainly feels that way and, you know, it's not a bad feeling. Welcome back, Tobe.

Rod Gudino

IF YOU GO DOWN TO THE WOODS TODAY...

THE VILLAGE

Starring Joaquin Phoenix,
Bryce Dallas Howard and Adrian Brody
Written and directed by M. Night Shyamalan
Buena Vista Pictures

Before embarking upon a critique of *The Village*, let us ponder for a moment the career trajectory of its creator. During one of horror cinema's bleakest periods, the post-*Scream* Horror Lite™ era, a young nobody named M. Night Shyamalan came out of apparently nowhere and knocked the world on its ass with *The Sixth Sense*. Subtle, soulful, brilliantly constructed and flawlessly executed, it flew into the face of all things Hollywood, made a gazillion bucks, got blow jobs from critics, introduced us to one of the most impressive child actors in many decades and, like *Pulp Fiction*, reminded us that Bruce Willis is capable of greatness when he's not pimping himself in shitty action films.

Shyamalan subsequently went from strength to strength with *Unbreakable* and *Signs*, proving that emotionally and intellectually deep horror films can actually appeal to a humongous audience. Short version: I love this guy's films and so does my mom. That's a fuckin' miracle.

The set-up of *The Village* lies in the grey area between the Brothers Grimm and *The Twilight Zone*: somewhere in the US in 1897, a village sits in a clearing surrounded by dense woods that are reputedly inhabited by monsters. The villagers are peaceful, back-to-the-earth types who have fled "the towns" to escape the violence of urban life. Interestingly, there are vague references to god and prayer, but these people are by no means a cult, at least in any conventional sense. By unspoken agreement, the locals stay out of the woods and the monsters stay out of the village... or at least that's how things were until now.

In the Shyamalan scheme of things, *The Village* sits neither at the top of his achievements (*Unbreakable* is the popular fave while I prefer *The Sixth Sense*) nor at the bottom (*Signs*, which is still a damn fine flick). The trademarks are all present and accounted for: stunning cinematography and design, multiple whiplash-inducing plot twists and wonderful performances (most notably from Ron Howard's daughter Bryce in the lead).

I wasn't aware of the generally negative critical reaction to *The Village* until after I saw it, and that's got me baffled. Sure, the



film is slow, the dialogue is stilted and the twists aren't as perfectly seamless as they are in some of Shyamalan's earlier efforts, but this is still one inventive, scary and heartfelt movie. And if I see a better film in our beloved genre this year, Gentle Reader, I'll be one very happy horror nerd indeed.

John W. Bowen

SCARY BECAUSE IT'S TRUE

LOVE OBJECT

Starring Desmond Harrington,
Melissa Sagemiller and Rip Torn
Written and directed
by Robert Parigi
Lions Gate Home Entertainment

Trust me on this one, folks: the depths of male sexual depravity will never be plumbed. I'm not saying that the ladies can't get their freak on, but guys... can be a bunch of sickos. The source of this bit of gender-specific loathing? A creepy little flick called *Love Object*.

Wrong Turn's Desmond Harrington plays Kenneth, a socially inept technical writer, great at creating instruction manuals but less adept at forming and sustaining relationships. Enter Lisa (Melissa Sagemiller), a

beautiful temp assigned to help Kenneth complete a big project. Kenneth, uncomfortable working with anyone but drawn to Lisa, decides to practice courting her by buying Nikki, a sex doll custom designed to look just like his co-worker. Initially a mere outlet for his sexual frustrations, Nikki becomes Kenneth's paramour. He clothes her, cuddles her, talks to her, makes love to her. No question, Kenneth is seriously fucked, but kind of happy in his own weird way. Soon Lisa notices Kenneth's increased confidence. They spend time together. Work becomes courtship, and Kenneth finds himself falling in love. Nikki doesn't like that.

Maybe you can see where this is going. Kenneth is quite insane, and pretty soon his dalliance with Lisa collides in his head with his need for Nikki. The result is gruesome, off-putting and more than a little disturbing.

Harrington is to be commended for accepting this risky role. His uneasy performance recalls Christian Bale's Patrick Bateman in *American Psycho*, although director Robert Parigi's script gives his star far less to work with, and Harrington, to be honest, is no Christian Bale.

I also couldn't help thinking about Lucky McKee's brilliant *May* since Kenneth, like





One Missed Call: MIIKE TOWNS Ringu with more humour and more scares.

May, is a misguided soul whose relatively harmless delusions give way to murderous insanity. But Kenneth is far less sympathetic, given that he is motivated by his libido as much as his heart. And what he does to Lisa, well, let's just say it's best if we keep this movie away from Andrea Dworkin.

I can't see women enjoying *Love Object*, primarily because it reinforces all their worst fears about men; that they can't handle love, that they're more comfortable funnelling their sexuality through porn than affection; that they can't accept women for who they are but instead have to pathologically remake them into their own warped idea of what a woman should be. *Love Object* is funny because it's true, but it's also scary because it's true.

Sean Plummer

MIIKE DOES J-HORROR

ONE MISSED CALL

Starring Ko Shibasaki, Kazue Fukiishi and Renji Ishibashi
Directed by Takashi Miike
Written by Minako Daira
Horizon Films

Dismiss *One Missed Call* as a *Ringu* rip-off at your peril. Not because you too may receive a fatal phone call from the future (although that is a possibility), but because

you will be depriving yourself of one of crazy Japanese director Takashi Miike's most satisfying commercial – but still bizarre – filmmaking efforts.

A little context: *One Missed Call* is very much like *Ringu*. Everyone on the Internet is saying so, and, for once, they are right. Sort of.

College student Yumi (Shibasaki) finds her friends dying around her in increasingly mysterious ways. The connection: each received a phone call from themselves three days in the future, at the exact moment of their deaths. Yumi investigates in order to save her friend Natsumi (Fukiishi) before she too is claimed by the mysterious entity whose psychic rage is spreading and claiming one victim after another. Along the way she discovers a growing urban legend, a family with a horrible secret and a ghostly girl with long black hair.

Sound familiar? *One Missed Call* bears strong similarity to *Ringu*, no question, but it's funnier, more entertaining and ultimately scarier than that J-horror classic. Miike (*Audition*, *Visitor Q*, *Ichu the Killer*) has strained *Ringu* through his weird brain and come up with a hybrid horror movie that grafts philosophy, touching sentiment, pitch-black humour and social critique onto what initially seems to be a mere genre exercise.

Rather than be limited by the high concept premise (i.e. let's make *Ringu* with cell-

phones instead of videotapes), Miike and screenwriter Minako Dairo use it to explore other themes, like the legacy of child abuse, the media's exploitive nature, and our reliance upon technology and our subsequent vulnerability because of it. Plus, there are some real scares.

One Missed Call is never as profoundly shocking as, say, Miike's *Audition*, but it creates an atmosphere of dread which left me with a bruise on my arm – I was holding myself that tight. And there are a number of surreal, chilling images I have yet to get out of my head. Is that my cell ringing? Ahhhh-hh!

Sean Plummer

SECOND SIGHT

THE EYE 2 DVD

Starring Eugenia Yuan, Qi Shu and Jesdaporn Pholdee
Directed by the Pang Brothers
Written by Jo Jo Yurt-chun Hui and Lawrence Cheng
Applause Pictures

Horror films are full of constants. For example: masked psychos prefer killing sexually active teens; blackouts are the best time to explore old buildings; chainsaws cut everything *but* trees; and ghosts have no respect for personal space. In *The Eye 2* they

DAVID CRONENBERG'S

VIDEODROME



"Superbly malignant...
an evil-media classic."
—VILLAGE VOICE

David Cronenberg's sci-fi/horror
classic starring James Woods and
Deborah Harry comes to DVD in a
double-disc director-approved special
edition from The Criterion Collection,
featuring a new anamorphic transfer
of the unrated edition.

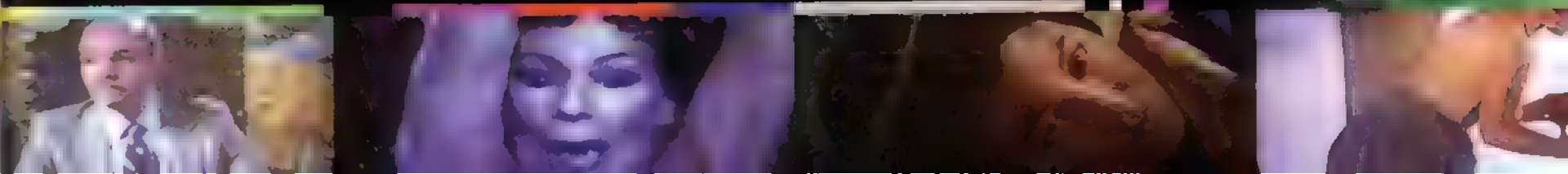
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The Eye 2: A triumph of technique, not substance.

hang out in your bathroom, lurk under your restaurant table, loiter around your bed, invite themselves into your cab, stare at you in the locker room, etc. Apparently when you die, so do your manners.

The sequel to the Pang Brothers' popular I-see-dead-people spook story is chock full of close-haunters, but lacks the engaging mystery that made the first one so gripping. Aside from said restless spirits and, of course, the title, *The Eye 2* has little in common with its prequel.

This time a neurotic young woman named Joey (Qi Shu) has a suicidal

brush with death that gives her the power to see ghosts. Coping with an unplanned pregnancy and the cold shoulder from her estranged boyfriend, she now also has to deal with the dead getting all up in her face. There is a mystery that ties it all together, but compared to the first *Eye* it's pretty tame.

Essentially, the movie is a melodrama with scares, some of which are super creepy, like a pair of bloody ghosts dropping in on Joey at a bus stop, but they are often just cheap shocks using quick pans and a screeching

soundtrack. And although the BOO! SCREAM! BOO! formula gets tired, the Pang Brothers prove that they're at the top of their game as far as visuals go.

The Eye 2 boasts incredible cinematography, stunning use of colour to set mood, and seamless special effects. One showpiece effects scene has Joey (on a side note, "Joey" is the worst name ever for a fright flick protagonist) terrorized in an elevator by a ghost that floats through the air as if it were in water. It's cool, and from a technical standpoint, the sequel bests the first *Eye*, but in a narrative-driven medium eye-candy alone doesn't cut it. This proves another constant: successful horror films are guaranteed a sequel... quality notwithstanding.

Dave Alexander

PG TENTACLE SEX

MALICE@DOLL

Starring Yukie Yamada
Directed by Keitarou Motonaga
Written by Chiaki Konaka
Artsmagic DVD Ltd.

Malice is a robot sex doll with an existential crisis. She was designed for very specific functions; to indulge every dark fantasy and sadistic whim of her masters. The only problem is, humanity has self-destructed, leaving her with an uncomfortable amount

of time on her hands and a lot of unanswered questions.

After encountering a bizarre, brain-like, feathered creature (who does what any hot-blooded, bizarre, brain-like feathered creature would do and proceeds to roger her relentlessly with its many tentacles), Malice is transformed into a living, breathing, human girl with the power to bring her fellow sex dolls to life with a single kiss. (I've never quite understood the Japanese fascination with tentacle sex but, then again, why question a good thing?)

Owing much to a vast array of influences, including *Bladerunner*, Salvador Dali and the Czech stop-motion puppet masters, *Malice@Doll* portrays a visually mesmerizing and nightmarish, techno-dystopian future world populated with grotesque creatures very reminiscent of the half-skeletal, half-flesh monstrosities in Jan Svankmejer's retelling of *Alice in Wonderland*.

And yet, despite its unrestrained imagination and lush surrealism, director Keitarou Motonaga cuts too many corners in the animation with the end result being that characters remain motionless for far too many frames. But perhaps the most annoying aspect of *Malice@Doll* is that, with the exception of about eight odd seconds, there's no sex in it! How can you have an anime about robot prostitutes with no sex? Doesn't compute. Perhaps Motonaga felt the subject matter was sophisticated enough to justify a less prurient approach.

Although he messes around with many of the usual Philip K. Dick themes including the uncertainty of memory, identity and the line between consciousness and dreams, Motonaga never penetrates these ideas to any satisfying degree; certainly not enough to justify *Malice@Doll*'s almost complete lack of sexually explicit shenanigans.

So, if you're strictly on the hunt for some quality wanking materials, you'd be well-advised to give this one a pass (instead the



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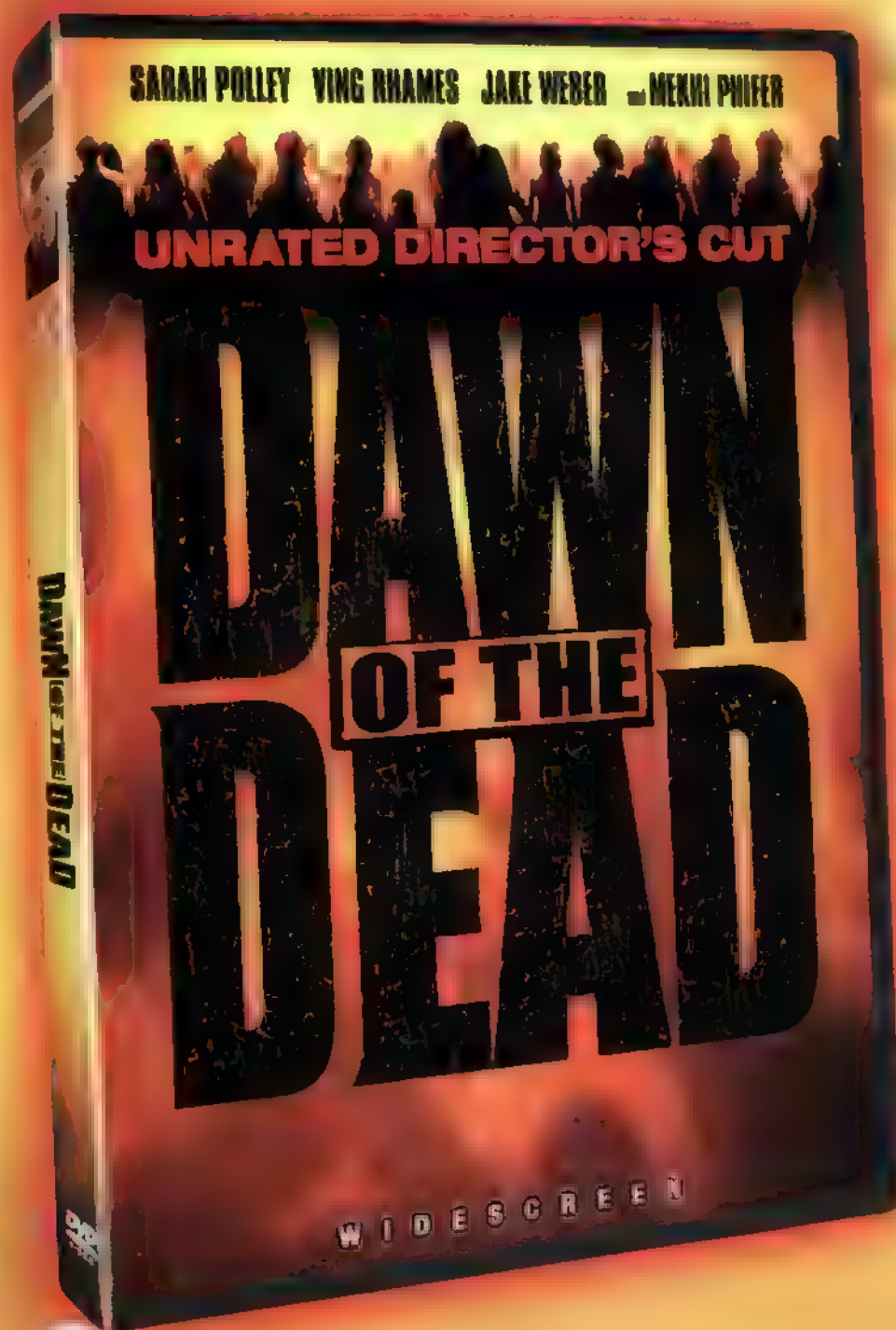
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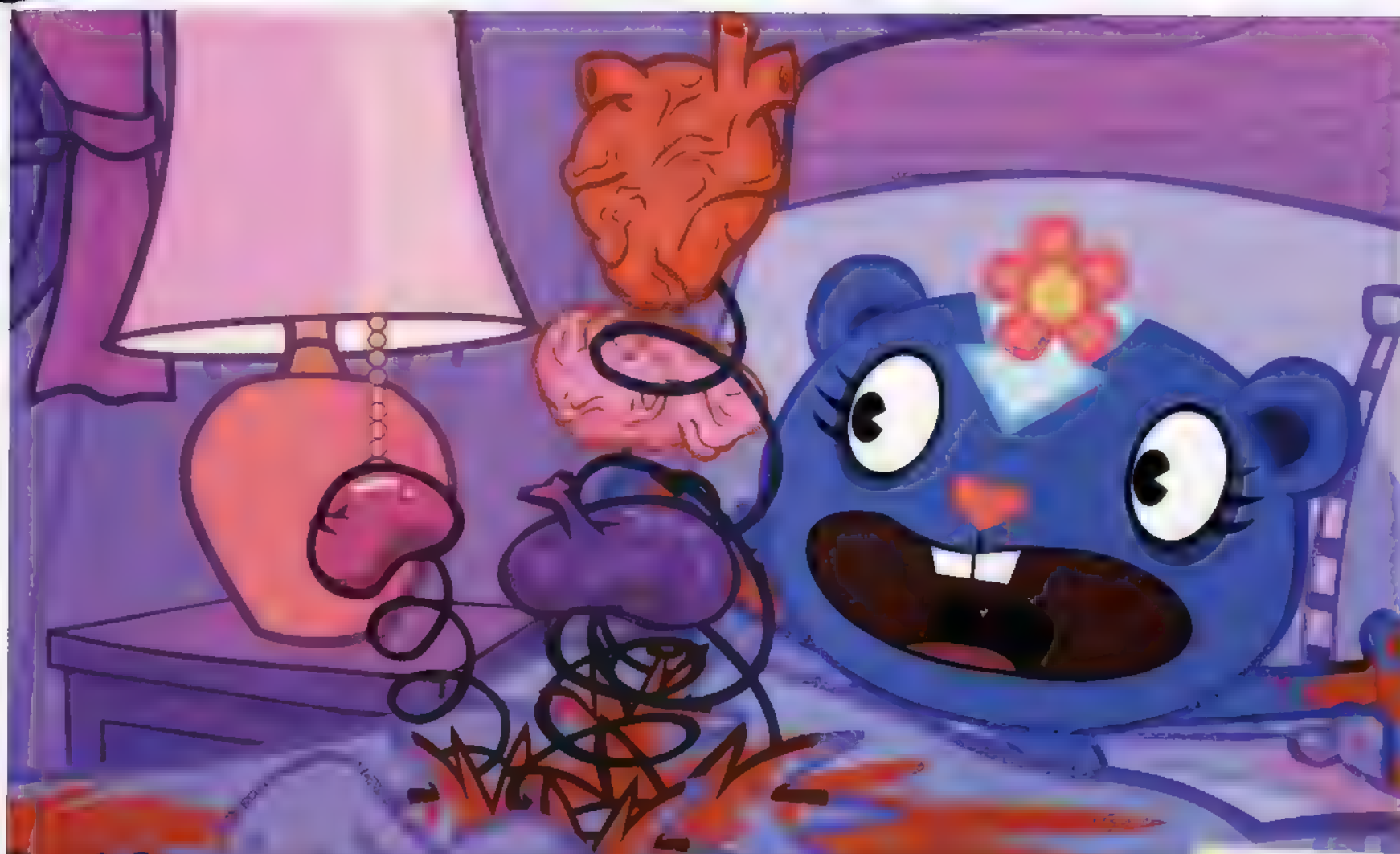
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Happy Tree Friends: Another bloodsoaked anthology of good family fun.



reviewer recommends the *Living Sex Toy Delivery Service* OAVs for all of your robot porn, pud-pulling requirements).

Stuart Andrews

IT'S FUN TO BLEED

HAPPY TREE FRIENDS VOL.3 THIRD STRIKE DVD

Starring Aubrey Ankrum, Michael Lipman and Dana Belben

Directed by Rhode Montijo

Animation by Rhode Montijo and Kenn Navarro
Mondo Media

Theeey're baaack! Ever since those freaky-deaky little animated terrors first invaded the *Rue Morgue* offices in 2002, the *Happy Tree Friends* have literally exploded and imploded, detonated, fractured, deflated, punctured and slivered – onto the horror scene, along with pretty much every other scene interested in watching cartoon violence that puts the likes of *Heavy Metal* to shame. Their popularity these days is exceeded only by their acute physical trauma. Hell, I even know someone with not one, but two *Happy Tree Friends* tattoos on his chest!

Over the past two years these crazy critters have died in so many ways that it's a monumental surprise that they haven't died of monotony. I didn't think this show could possibly get any gorier, but it appears Montijo and Navarro just sit around all day coming up with new and inventive ways to slaughter cute, fuzzy things (and I thought we were the only ones who did that). I seriously think these guys might be on drugs, and if they are, they should take *more* – this shit is funny! It's the kind of extreme violence that no commercial horror film could ever get away with.

Third Strike compiles fourteen longer, gorier episodes of ridiculous flash-animated fun, thankfully lacking the annoying opening music between shows that makes you want to gouge out your own eyeballs with a plastic spork. Standouts include *Out Of Sight*, *Out Of Mime*, a Halloween yarn in which the blind mole mistakes a trick-or-treater's head for a pumpkin and gores the little guy's noggin like a fleshy gourd. Another highlight includes an episode that gives weight to my favourite phrase, "I'd rather chew broken glass."

In all, another bloodsoaked anthology of

good family fun. Now if only the creators would do a series based on horror film homages, I'd happily jump out of my own skin for them. You guys reading this?

Jen Vuckovic

STAY TUNED FOR MORE ITO

LONG DREAM

Starring Masami Horiuchi, Kashiwabara Shuuji, and Eriko Hatsune
Directed by Higuchinsky

Written by Junji Ito
Omega Micott Inc.

Following up a brilliant, original horror film like *Uzumaki* with a low-budget, hour-long, made-for-television movie is kind of like dining on sushi for dinner and being served Goldfish crackers for dessert – unavoidably disappointing. Director Higuchinsky's 2000 big screen adaptation of Manga master Junji Ito's story caused more

Make This Halloween a Fright to Remember!



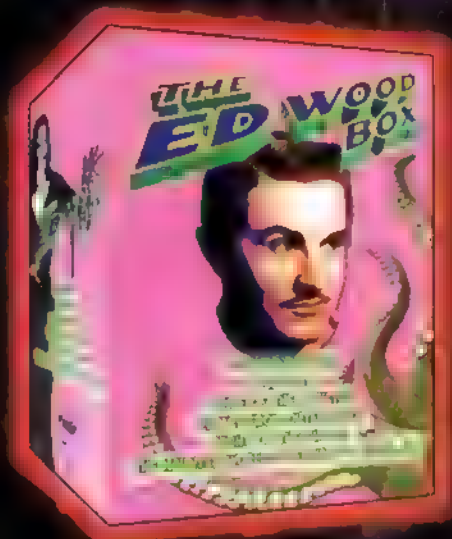
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HOW TO KILL YOURSELF

SUICIDE

Starring Markus Eberhard,
Raoul Heimrich and Yvonne De Berk
Directed by Raoul Heimrich
Written by Yvonne Wunschell
Troma Entertainment

Okay, so *Tales From the Crapper*, Troma's most recent in-house effort, is unlikely to win Kaufman, Herz and company any new converts. In fact, *Crapper's* failure is thrown into even sharper relief coming as it does on the heels of Troma's eight-year winning streak, a watershed period that gave us *Tromeo and Juliet*, *Terror Firmer* and *Citizen Toxie: The Toxic Avenger Part IV*.

Such a misstep is practically guaranteed by the law of showbiz averages, and yet *Suicide*—a micro-budget German film Troma recently acquired for distribution—may prove to be their saving grace for 2004. But whatever you do, don't expect typical Troma fodder—there's no mutant sex, no explosions, only a little nudity, the violence is played agonizingly straight and there's nary a fart joke to be had.

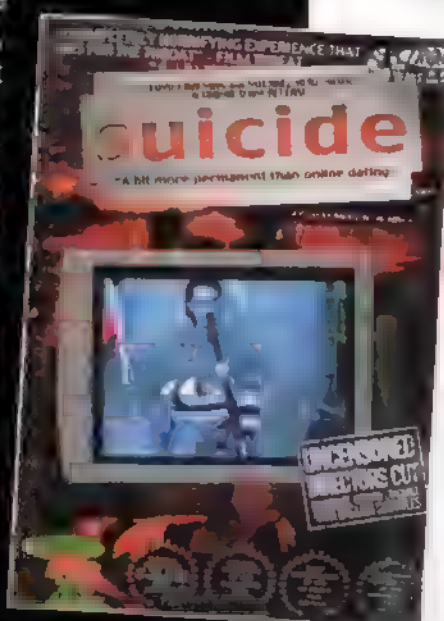
Admittedly the concept of a suicide mockumentary sent up a few red flags for me at first. Between innovative comedies like *This Is Spinal Tap*, *A Mighty Wind* and the postmodern horror phenomenon that was *The Blair Witch Project*, the mockumentary conceit has pretty much run its course, so I was actually a bit leary about this mock doc in which a couple set up a

website and offer to film people offing themselves. A little too shooting-fish-in-a-barrel, I thought, or maybe shooting-footage-of-fish-shooting-themselves-in-a-barrel, or something.

Well, dang me and screw my preconceived notions—we have a winner! What could have been an almost-clever near miss rises miles above itself, thanks largely to strong performances, imaginative set pieces and an uneasy prevailing moral ambiguity. The suicides themselves are convincingly staged, and no two feel exactly the same—some are darkly humorous, some weirdly graceful, some almost unwatchably ugly.

Many filmmakers would be tempted to climb on top of such a story and preach, and many more would use it as a bullhorn to ask the Big Questions, but the makers of *Suicide* simply take us out onto an ethical limb and leave us there. Not a comfy place to be, but I'll take it over easy answers any day.

John W. Bowen



than a few horr-gasms among genre lovers (see *RM#39*) by capturing the author's quite literally twisted vision with an onslaught of spiral-themed doom.

Later, in 2000, Higuchinsky made a shorter, cheaper Ito adaptation for Japanese TV called *Nagai yume* (translated: *Long Dream*). The story opens at a Tokyo hospital where a doctor, played by Masa-mi Horiuchi (a reporter in *Uzu-maki*) and his assistant tend to a patient who claims to be traumatized by a monster. The "monster" is actually a young man (Kashiwabara Shuui) who was admitted a few days prior for a bizarre sleep disorder. His dreams are lengthening so that mere seconds of real time equal days of dreamtime. As days turn to weeks, months and eventually years, he loses his mind and can no longer distinguish between dreams and reality. Even more alarmingly, his body undergoes a series of bizarre alien-like mutations that

cause his eyes to bug out, his fingers to lengthen to Nosferatu proportions, and his skin to turn Martian green.

Eventually, he leaves behind a pile of red crystals, which become the subject of the doctor's experiments. It seems the doc's former girlfriend (played in flashbacks by *Uzumaki* star Eiko Hatsune) may have suffered from the same affliction, and questions remain about the malady's contagiousness.

Unfortunately, this is a great tale that really requires much more than a one-off TV special to do it justice. The googly-eye makeup is comical, the keyboard score is lame, and video just doesn't stand up to Higuchinsky's visuals. Even a really good box of Goldfish crackers is still a box of Goldfish crackers.

Dave Alexander



A Romantic Comedy.
With Zombies.

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This September, don't let the head.

"AN ABSOLUTE BLAST!"



Decoys: An "American Pie meets Species" Canadian alien sex comedy.

CANADIAN CAMP CACKLE

DECOYS DVD

Starring Corey Sevier, Kim Poirier
and Elias Toufexis
Directed by Matthew Hastings
Written by Matthew Hastings
and Tom Berry
Lions Gate Home Entertainment

It may be unpatriotic to admit, but I'll take a low-budget piece of Ottawa-filmed sci-fi trash like *Decoys* over Atom Egoyan's latest snorefest any night of the week. Unlike way too many Canadian movies – the ones where good intentions trump little things like, oh, entertainment value (I'm looking at you, *Ararat*) – *Decoys* revels in its B-movie roots. And it's funny, eh!

The "American Pie meets Species" tag trumpeted on the DVD cover is a pretty accurate summary; college freshman Luke (Sevier) discovers that the two blonde chipmunks living down the hall in his dorm are actually "hot alien[s] with snake tits." Could they be responsible for a spate of recent deaths on campus where the male victims are found frozen to death (from the inside!) in, um, compromising positions? (The investigating detective, upon discovering one poor dead schmo sporting an icy boner, asks playfully, "Anyone for a little ring toss?")

Meanwhile, Luke's party-hard virgin sidekick Roger (Toufexis) falls for one of the xenomorphic cuties, Constance (Poirier). And, of course, Luke's one-of-the-guys best friend Alex (Meghan Ory) is like, totally in love with him even though he doesn't notice.

This likely all sounds way too cliché to stomach, but bear with me.

A second viewing (no, I have nothing better to do, what's it to ya?) reveals that – tabernac! – *Decoys* holds up. The blonde beasties, who try to impregnate their one night stands through CGI tentacles that burst from a birthmark between their boobs, conceptually crossbreeds *Species*' Sil with Marilyn Chambers' vampiric Rose from David Cronenberg's *Rabid*. In fact, Alex even suggests to Luke that they forego one frat party for a Cronenberg film festival. Nudge nudge, wink wink. Original, no, but pretty cool in a cheesy way.

My one complaint? Not enough boobage. If you're selling me a Canadian alien sex comedy, show me some damn skin! And, no, green doesn't count.

Sean Plummer

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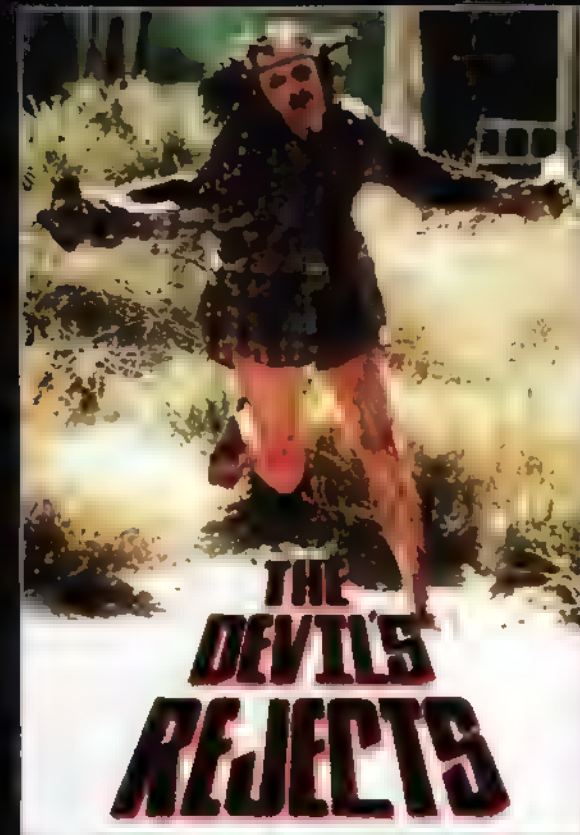
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Boa vs. Python The cinematic equivalent of Doritos.

NOT WHAT YOU'D EXPECT?

BOA VS. PYTHON DVD

Starring Jaime Bergman, Velizar Binev and Angel Boris

Written and directed by David Flores
Columbia TriStar Home Video

Perhaps I suffer from some sort of phallic complex; perhaps I just have a squishy spot for useless movies that are designed for the lowbrow to love and the highbrow to hate. But, holy cobra, I really enjoyed *Boa vs. Python*, a made-for-cable CGI slitherfest only vaguely connected to DTV clunkers *Python* and *Boa* – that really worked my worm.

Made for the Sci Fi Channel and loaded with cheesy blood and she-jiggle, *Boa vs. Python*

is a self-conscious (I hope) laff riot about a big old python let loose by a mui macho Ruskie game hunter (and his playboy playmate gal pal) who intend to track and kill the phony baloney beastie for kicks. Instead, the king-sized sucker winds up in a Club Medesque resort and proceeds to gulp up the guests.

The serpentine plot thickens when a bunch of fourth rate actors posing as CIA agents sic their genetically fucked-with pet boa on the equally oversized reptile and before you can say Rikki Tikki Tavi – blammo – true to the title, boa meets python! And both proceed to shave their names in each other's scales.

When asking yourself who the Hell would waste their precious lives watching something called *Boa vs. Python*, I must step in and ask you to hold



your forked tongue. Movies like this are cinematic Doritos – cheaply made, unhealthy and scented like fermented sneaker feet, but a tasty business when you're in the right mood. The effects are predictably chintzy but enthusiastic (the snakes are friendly-looking until they open their terrifyingly toothy maws), the acting isn't abjectly horrible (except for the ludicrously dubbed extras – the film was shot in Bulgaria). Add to that, the film has a sense of humour (heads-up on the implant gag) and the big title brawl delivers the goofy goods. And it's a damn sight better than that overpriced, super-sized, half-assed slasher McMovie *Freddy vs. Jason*.

Chris Alexander

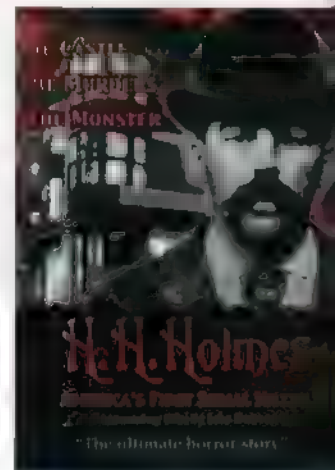
A GRIM TALE

H.H. HOLMES: AMERICA'S FIRST SERIAL KILLER

Starring Beka, Tony Jay and Ed Bertagnoli
Written and directed by John Borowski
Waterfront Productions

Like horror movies? Sure you do. Which means you're probably a fan of low-budget filmmaking, given that Hollywood's current idea of scary is *Van Helsing*. The underground has bred some of the best chillers of recent years, but indie doesn't always mean good. Bad acting, cheesy effects and incompetence have spoiled more than one ambitious but shoestring production. The same goes for documentaries. Low budget by nature, docs often suffer from a surfeit of ideas but a paucity of professionalism.

John Borowski, however, proves that determination, guts and talent can overcome any financial limitation. It took the direc-



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THE HILLSIDE STRANGLER

Starring Brittany Daniel, Clifton Collins Jr. and Bret Roberts

Directed by Chris Fisher

Written by Chris Fisher and Aaron Pope

Silver Nitrate Films

If he was dead, Gaspar Noé would be turning in his grave. It turns out that his controversial art house shocker, *Irreversible*, has spawned an imitator and, believe me, there is no flattery involved. Restless camera work aside, *The Hillside Strangler* is like Dubya in a good suit – he may look smart, but he ain't.

But appropriating Noé's swooping camera is only one of director Chris Fisher's many sins. *The Hillside Strangler* goes wrong at every turn, from cinematography to casting to dialogue to the frickin' wardrobe. What begins as a stylish picture about decadence and its evil flip side soon degenerates into unwatchable exploitation.

Strangler focuses on the real rash of kidnap/rape/murders committed by psychos Angelo Buono and Kenneth Bianchi in late '70s Hollywood. Our heroine is Samantha Stone (Daniel), a troubled psychologist called in by LA's finest to diagnose suspect Bianchi (Collins Jr.). Sam thinks Kenneth is innocent but soon realizes that the meek young man may not be all he appears, especially after he unexpectedly shows up at her home. Complicating matters somewhat is Samantha's reckless sex-and-drugs lifestyle and abusive dealer boyfriend Jack (Bret Roberts).

That's the set-up, now let's talk problems. Any serial killer biopic has to deal with comparisons to *Monster*, director Patti Jenkins' Oscar-winning flick that did it right by setting up a great actor with a solid script that balanced truth with dramatic license. *Strangler* shows too little respect for the case's facts. Samantha, for instance, is a composite of the many male headshrinkers who worked on the real Bianchi, but it's unlikely any of them – including hypnotism authority Dr. Martin T. Orme – perpetually wore low-cut dresses to work, hung nude self-portraits behind their desk, or debauched themselves at drug-fuelled orgies in the Hollywood hills. Or maybe they did, but it just doesn't seem likely.

Facts aside, Fisher lingers on Daniel's frequently nude body way longer than the plot requires, not that I'm complaining, but it sure as hell compromises the film's docudramatic aspirations by shooting it with a pornographer's eye. Throw in annoying cinematography, including three identically shot run-on interrogation scenes, outrageously inappropriate wardrobe (I wish my young hot counselor had that much cleavage), Daniels' wooden acting, and you've got one evil film. Too bad it's not the kind of evil we like.

Sean Plummer



tor/writer/producer three years and several maxed-out credit cards to make *H.H. Holmes: America's First Serial Killer*, but his efforts were worth it. Through an uncanny use of photos, narration, music and dramatic recreations, Borowski brings to life the story of "the monster of 63rd Street."

This is basically the same story told in Erik Larson's fascinating book *The Devil in the White Story*. In the last years of the 19th century, Henry Howard Holmes (née Herman Mudgett) used his affinity for medicine and crime to become America's first known serial killer. The man set-up shop in Chicago as a pharmacist just as the Columbian Exposition was being built in the Windy City. Realizing that millions of visitors from around the world would soon descend upon Chicago, he constructed a hotel (later known as The Castle) close to the fairgrounds to house the hordes. Visitors came but not all of them went.

For Holmes, you see, had built a house of horrors, complete with a basement filled with vats of acid, a dissection table, various instruments of torture, and a blast furnace to dispose of his victims' remains. Holmes' body count has been estimated to be anywhere between nine and 100 victims.

Borowski's script, read with authority by trained actor Tony Jay, details Holmes' crimes with ruthless efficiency. The recreations, filmed in silent black and white, are evocative but leave the details to the imagination. Douglas Romaine Stevens' score successfully recalls Bernard Hermann's efforts for Alfred Hitchcock, helping create genuine tension as the story wends its way from crime to punishment. The result is a compelling documentary told with authority and confidence, money be damned.

Sean Plummer

FOR THE LOVE OF LOVECRAFT

THE ELDRITCH INFLUENCE THE LIFE, VISION AND PHENOMENON OF H.P. LOVECRAFT

Starring Ramsey Campbell, Neil Gaiman and Stuart Gordon

Directed by Shawn Owens
Hermetic Productions

Once again, good documentaries don't need *Independence Day*-sized budgets to be worth watching. If the subject is interesting and handled with a reasonable amount of intelligence, audiences can do without a lot of razzle dazzle. Michael Moore, a very smart and rich man, can tell you that.

Thankfully, director Shawn Owens' subject, Howard Phillips Lovecraft, is of particular interest to a large number of *Rue Morgue* readers. The awkwardly titled *The Eldritch Influence: The Life, Vision and Phenomenon of H.P.*

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OVERLOOKED, FORGOTTEN AND DISMISSED

THIS ISSUE: LANCE VS. THE BIMBOS!

SENSELESS SUCKFEST

THE VAMPIRE EFFECT

Columbia TriStar Home Entertainment

Ever wondered what a vampire kung fu movie would look like if it was made by Walt Disney? Imagine two young, ditzzy female Hong Kong pop stars (for real) prancing around fighting overstuffed animals and pretty boy vampire princes more concerned with their new cellphones than sucking blood. Throw in a useless Jackie Chan cameo in a senseless wedding scene and you've got *The Vampire Effect*. Though well shot, with some copycat "Buffy-esque" CG effects, there ain't enough wire-fu in the world to make me watch this one again.

Body Count: 54

Duration Of Fight Over A Stuffed Teddy Bear: 3 min 6 seconds



NO LAUGHING

DIRECTOR'S CUT: A KILLER COMEDY

Landfall Productions

Two blonde bimbos and their equally vacant boyfriends travel to Hollywood to act in a horror movie but instead find themselves part of a reality television show gone horribly wrong. The demented movie producer and his fucked-up brother start carving up the extras with saws, drills and even a dismembered leg. As far as horror-comedies go, this movie isn't particularly scary or funny, and there's even a suspicious ending that appears to have been tacked on in an attempt to salvage it as a black comedy. You could watch this movie or drink a bottle of JD then shoot yourself in the face, either way it's gonna suck for you!

Body Count: 8

Naked Young Nubile Sex-Starved Aspiring Actresses: 0



PRETTY PUERILE

VAMPIRE VIXENS FROM VENUS

Satanachie Entertainment

Okay, first you've got vampires, my favourite monster. Then vixens, my favourite kind of women. And finally, Venus, my favourite, ummm planet, I guess. Put 'em all together and you've got yourself one sexy chunk of horror-sleaze, right? Wrong! Three bodacious alien bombshells land on Earth to suck the life essence from sexually aroused males to sell on the Interstellar black market (I feel so dirty writing that). Delivering more boners than bone-chills, the scariest thing about this movie is that the producers have threatened to make a sequel.

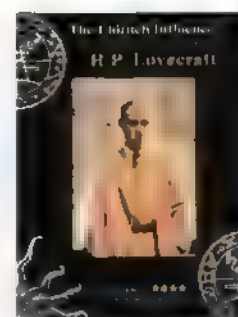
Body Count: 20

Number Of Times The Vixens Remove Their Tops: 14



Last Chance Lance

Lovecraft combines talking heads with amateurish dramatizations, eloquent quotes from the writer's extensive letters collection, photos, and artwork inspired by his unique vision to not only detail his life but also the ongoing impact his work has had on both admirers and other artists.



For horror fans, Lovecraft is probably best known as the raison d'être behind much of producer/director Stuart Gordon's career. Lovecraft's weird tales about old gods and insane scientists inspired Gordon's *Re-Animator* (1985), *From Beyond* (1986), *Castle Freak* (1995) and, most recently, the somewhat acclaimed *Dagon* (2001). Lovecraft's literary mythos – which suggests that the universe was ruled countless ages ago by unimaginably horrific Great Old Ones (Cthulhu and Yog-Sothoth among them) who lie in wait in another dimension – has inspired many well-known writers: Ramsey Campbell, Neil Gaiman and Brian Lumley among them. All of these well-spoken filmmakers and scribblers appear here.

The recounting of Lovecraft's life, from his syphilitic father and demanding mother, through to his racism and creative relationships with other writers, is necessary and wholly adequate. But what makes *The Eldritch Influence* worth watching is the delineation of Lovecraft's influence upon the world, a phenomenon which prospers with each subsequent generation.

Much like a virus, Lovecraft's writing has infected countless other creative minds since his death in 1937. Author Ramsey Campbell happily admits to "slavishly imitating" Lovecraft in his earliest works, while Sandman creator Neil Gaiman explains his appeal by calling Lovecraft "rock 'n' roll." Then there are the fans who play Lovecraft-inspired role-playing games, buy plush Cthulhu dolls, start mythos-based cults, draw pictures of the unseeable Great Old Ones, and make short films from his work. Would Lovecraft approve of all these bastard progeny? Not likely, but he may draw some comfort from knowing that the Old Ones live on.

Sean Plummer

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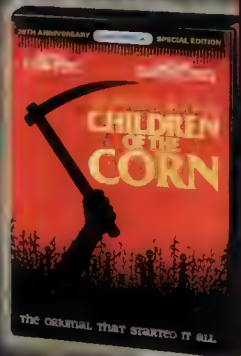
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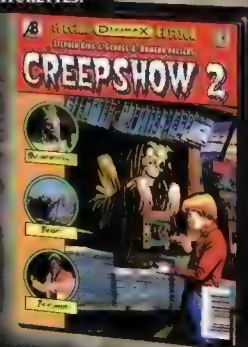
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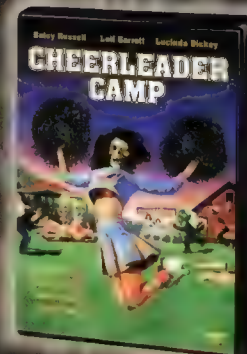
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After countless years, DOUGLAS BUCK'S sought-after horror shorts finally arrive on DVD... and the results are excruciating.

The Cinema of SUFFERING

by Rod Gudino

Buck's thematic transition over the three films from graphic violence to the aftermath of violence, the bloody gem here remains *Cutting Moments*, and that's not just the gorehound in me talking.

Cutting Moments is as much a genre picture as

In *Home*, Buck lingers once again over his suburban holocaust, though this time the act of violence is contemplated rather than acted out. By the time we get to *Prologue*, we see that the contemplation has reached a meditative state – the 53-minute movie studies three emotionally shattered individuals linked to a past so traumatic, that it can barely be whispered about within each of their domestic jail cells.

Listening to Buck comment on the movies, it's obvious that his motivation lies somewhere outside of the genre, even though his undeniable predisposition for extreme subject matter will always keep him close by. Nevertheless, despite the profound cruelty at the heart of these stories, Buck's progression is from the grotesque to

the esoteric – even if you find yourself less interested in that transition than in the riveting gore of *Cutting Moments*, you'll find the director's commentary and technical insight worth checking out.

Basically, *Family Portraits* is the reason Douglas Buck is destined to become a very important filmmaker in America's future. Get this disc and see for yourself. The release presents the shorts separately and as one movie, along

with liner notes from Larry (Wendigo) Fessenden and Peter (Ghost Story) Straub. Available from www.glasseyepix.com/html/buck.html.

"This DVD contains graphic violence and adult subject matter that may be unsuitable for children." Never has a warning understated its case as dramatically as on the back of *Family Portraits: A Trilogy of America*, writer/director Douglas Buck's belated short film release. The two-disc set, which contains films we've written about before (see *RM#5* and *RM#37*), is loaded up with goodies, including several commentary tracks from Buck along with critic/author Douglas E. Winter and film professors John Freitas and Marc Lapadula, some trailers, original screenplays, a few behind-the-scenes featurettes and, of course, the shorts themselves: *Cutting Moments* (1996), *Home* (1998) and *Prologue* (2004).

Before going into the films, it's worth noting that Buck's shorts have showcased at over 30 international film festivals, been incessantly talked about and sought after, and are both reviled and respected as some of the most high impact shorts to ever come out of the genre. Because of that, it's no surprise that, despite

it is a serious – very serious – dramatic portrait of personalities undergoing psychological meltdown. Played out through agonizing pauses and subtle suggestion, the film pulls back the curtains on a young family teetering on the edge of oblivion. Dad has been raping his eight-year-old son and mother has become emotionally comatose, casually informing her husband that the police will soon be taking away the child. Of course, this kind of pain runs deep, and Buck digs deepest in one of the more hard-to-stomach scenes of mutilation put before a viewing audience. *Cutting Moments* revels in explicitness, yes, but it also suggests a disturbing denouement that is most troubling because it is – in the context of the narrative at any rate – oddly positive.





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HISTORY OF THE NUMBER ONE KILLER

BY DAVE ALEXANDER

In 2001, Japanese filmmaker Takashi Miike dropped a bomb on extreme cinema fans with *Ichi the Killer* (RM#33), a black comedic orgy of perverse violence, sexual torture and gory gangster warfare. Based on Hideo Yamamoto's serialized Manga stories, the punchline is the title character Ichi: a nervous, pudgy man-boy crammed into a deadly superhero costume. With a little hypnosis-induced rage and razor-sharp boot blades, the unlikely assassin cuts a bloody swath through Yakuza killers that both sickens him to tears and arouses him to climax.

Yamamoto's bizarre hero first influenced Miike in the director's 1997 film *Full Metal Yakuza*, which borrows heavily from the original tales. When Miike eventually made his official *Ichi* adaptation it became wildly popular and oft-censored. More recently, the character's back story has been, well, fleshed-out in *Ichi 1: The Animation Episode 0* (2002) and the low-budget live action prequel *1-Ichi* (2003). Here's the blood-splattered rundown.

FULL METAL YAKUZA (1997) DVD

Arts Magic

This Miike straight-to-video cheapie is often compared to *Ichi the Killer* but with shades of *Robo-Cop* and *Frankenstein*. Written by Itaru Era, who's penned seven Miike projects including *Visitor Q*, it centers around a blundering wannabe Yakuza soldier with a weak stomach for violence who wakes up as a goofy *Power Ranger*/Frankencyborg complete with a giant back tattoo and huge penis (shown only as a pixelated blur) after a botched assassination attempt on his boss.

Despite its unmistakable similarities to *Ichi the Killer*, *Full Metal Yakuza* only skims the disturbing depths Miike would explore later. *FMY* is cheaper and cruder, but it's not nearly as out of control as *Ichi* and, really, that's the fun part.

ICHI 1: THE ANIMATION EPISODE 0 (2002) DVD

Central Park Media

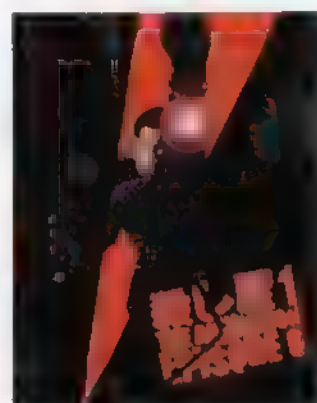
The medium of anime isn't wasted on detailing Ichi's bloodstained origin as he savages Kakihara – the main (gangster) character from *Ichi*



the Killer – during the opening minute of the movie. Miike voices Kakihara in the pre-credit sequence but it's a small role; *Ichi 1: The Animation Episode 0* concentrates on the events leading up to Ichi becoming an assassin.

Subject to schoolyard bullying and his parents' violent sex sessions at home, Ichi struggles to contain his own sexual fascination with violence and it eventually, um, spurts out in geysers when he gets pay-back with a flurry of skull-crushing kicks.

Overall, the 46-minute episode is darker than Miike's live action version because it's almost completely devoid of humour. Animated Ichi suffers more abuse, digs animal mutilation, and lacks comic awkwardness in general. *Episode 0* is also considerably more faithful to the original stories of Hideo Yamamoto, that sick, demented genius.



1-ICHI (2003) DVD

OddityCinema.com

Ichi returns to bawl, kick ass and ejaculate once again in this low-budget shot-on-video prequel to *Ichi the Killer*. Miike's assistant director on that film, Masato Tanno, makes his directing debut with a screenplay by Sakichi Saito, who also penned the *Ichi* anime, and appeared in

Kill Bill as "Charlie Brown", the owner of the House of Blue Leaves nightclub(!).

This time the main character is Mr. Dai, the toughest student in his Japanese school district. Dai is perplexed but mostly annoyed because spineless twerp Ichi (Nao Tanno reprising the role) watches him fight rivals from other schools and laughs! Little does Dai know, Ichi is actually turned on by the violence. When a rival school bullies the nerve-wracked Ichi past the breaking point, a new transfer student named Onizame witnesses the resulting massacre and eventually challenges both Dai and Ichi.

1-Ichi also finally explains where Ichi ("number one" in Japanese) gets his name. All hail the horny childlike psycho killer – HEEEAAYAAAH! ☹

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INDIE TERROR FEST!

BY STEUART ANDREWS AND NATHAN TYLER

PEOPLE ARE DEAD

www.mo-freek.com

From a purely cinematic perspective, New York City is in a class of its own. Hell, it's practically the France of the USA! Where would we be without the likes of Abel Ferrara, Larry Fessenden and Douglas Buck? Well, add to that list director Kevin Ford, who proves with *People Are Dead* that NYC continues to command the American independent horror film.

People Are Dead follows an array of characters loosely connected by the exploits of one of the most sympathetic necrophiliacs in film-dom: a misunderstood young woman who kidnaps dead bodies to shower them with more love and affection than they ever received when alive.

With Cassavettes-inspired cinema vérité, totally naturalistic performances, and a soundtrack made up entirely of Sonic Youth songs, *People Are Dead* is Kevin Ford's love letter to New York City's dark undercurrents. As one character puts it, "New York is scary, right? That's what it's meant to be. It's not meant to be friendly. It's the big, bad city." SA



CREEPY TALES: GIRLS NIGHT OUT

www.cinemasky.com

Michael P. Russin's follow-up to his 2001 straight-to-video anthology, *Creepy Tales*, is surprisingly enlightening because until now, I'd never fully appreciated the power of the x20 fast-forward button on my DVD remote.

In *Creepy Tales: Girls Night Out*, three ineptly realized vignettes are tied together by a relentlessly cheesy Master of Ceremonies who's only entertaining because of his total lack of onscreen charisma. With a title like *Girls Night Out*,

you'd figure the pain of having to sit through a merciless onslaught of rehashed dreck would be somewhat lessened by a few tantalizing tidbits of gratuitous T&A — but you'd be dead wrong.

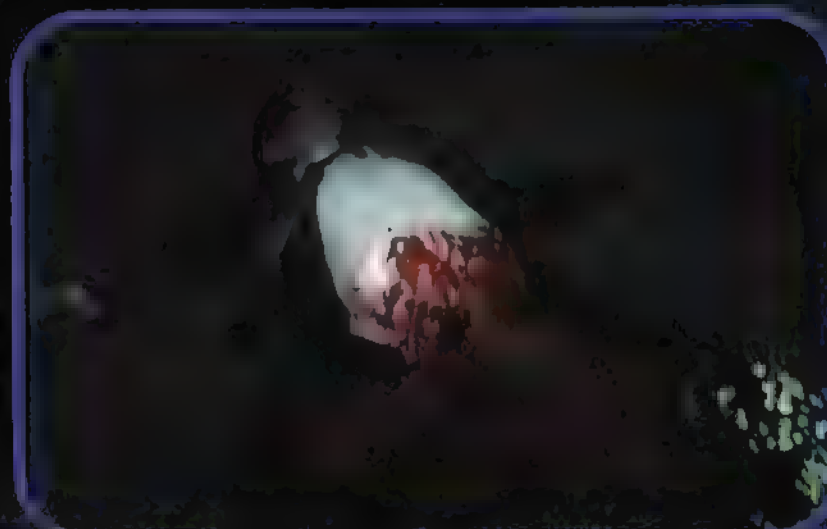
Instead of girls gone wild, this is girls gone mild! So here's a word of advice to any of you budding, shock-meisters out there: if you can't resist polluting our beloved genre with more low-grade, witless garbage for the semi-retarded, at least follow in the footsteps of the great master, Lloyd Kaufman, and throw in some poot-tang for fuck's sake! SA

THE GHOULS

www.crappyworldfilms.com

Eric Hayes is a crack-smoking videographer obsessed with documenting the nightly exploits of a sewer-dwelling gang of flesh-eating fiends (imagine Dianne Fosse genetically spliced with Harvey Keitel from *The Bad Lieutenant*).

Writer/director Chad Ferrin gives us a glimpse of an information dystopia where suffering and brutality unfold before ever-present cameras; signifying nothing but titillation for an overstimulated viewing public. Lovers of grimy, low-budget horror films will enjoy wallowing in the filth of *The Ghoul*s and, as an added treat, Joseph Pilato (Rhodes from *Day of the Dead*!) turns in a typically enthusiastic performance as the sleazy, TV producer who trades carnage for cash. SA



INSIGHT OF EVIL

www.theasylum.cc

This mediocre \$50,000 feature by Canadian filmmaker Nigel Hartwell is about a group of high school stereotypes who trek up to a cottage to celebrate the start of summer. Unbeknownst to them, a horrible death took place there only months before and upon their arrival – you guessed it – strange things begin to happen.

Insight isn't a poorly-made movie, but as a horror film it just doesn't work because, like too many directors today, Hartwell shot it like a music video. It's stylized to a fault with experimental shots, colour changes, intrusive music, and other technical shenanigans which only isolate the audience from the narrative and its characters.

Amazingly, *Insight* was picked up for distro by kick-ass genre production/distribution company The Asylum (the folks responsible for Stuart Gordon's *King of the Ants*), though we're not sure why. NT



MÉCANIX

www.institut-pain.com

Rémy Mathieu Larochelle's incomprehensible mess of experimental cinematic splooge *Mécanix* (oddly, an Official Selection of the Fantasia Film Festival) features a perpetually belching, crudely animated, stop-motion monster demon who controls the fate of an enslaved society of mindless, robotic, human drones.

Imagine if the warbling foetus from *Eraserhead* lived long enough to win a grant from the National Film Board of Canada, and you may very well begin to comprehend what Larochelle's visually oppressive, monochromatic, poor man's Jan Svankmajer universe looks like. Dieter from *Sprockets* would prematurely ejaculate in his leotards within the first ten minutes, but for anyone who's relatively sane, *Mécanix* is the intellectual equivalent of the Heimlich Maneuver. SA



THE TENEMENT

www.braindamagefilms.com
www.lightanddark.net

Glen Baisley's *The Tenement* is one of the most talked about new releases in the B-horror scene for two reasons; it stars Michael Gingold, Managing Editor of Fangoria and, hell, it's also pretty damn good!

The Tenement focuses its lens on an old apartment building that has a strange effect on its inhabitants – namely, madness and murder. Director Baisley does a tremendous job of squeezing good performances out of a cast of relative unknowns and keeping the disturbing and, at times, humorous mood consistent throughout. This is a filmmaker to watch and a film to see. NT



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DAD'S DEAD

6:40 mins./www.dadsdead.com

Scousers (those strange creatures from Liverpool who all sound like The Beatles) have finally infiltrated the Rue Morgue Empire, and just in time for Halloween! Not only do we have a front cover by Clive Barker and a few drunken burlblings by yours truly, but it is with great Merseyside pride that I tell you about one of the most uniquely inventive short films I've seen in ages: *Dad's Dead* by Liverpoolian filmmaker Chris Shepherd. Narrator Ian Hart (*Land and Freedom*, *Liam*) tells the story of Johnno, a charming young sociopath who likes to spray-paint pigeons, throw cats off the tenth floor and collect Dr. Who Weetabix cards. With beautifully animated scenes of childhood nostalgia that spring to life from rubbish tips and derelict estates, *Dad's Dead* is a relentlessly expressionistic tour de force that will leave you gobsmacked and needing to see it again, immediately! SA



THE CRYPT CLUB

23 mins./www.thecryptclub.com

Miguel Gallego's atmospheric horror *The Crypt Club*, despite being a very stylish and tightly constructed piece, fails to rise above a weak premise and a narrative that is riddled with one implausible plot twist after another. Fifteen-year-old Julie must commit a mortal sin and desecrate the grave of the town martyr if she hopes to gain entrance to the exclusive Crypt Club.

Actor Alison Pill deserves special mention as the manipulative Liesl who maniacally persuades the young Julie to betray her sense of Catholic decency, though the real star of *The Crypt Club* is Nicholas Longstaff's haunting, operatic score that will delight even the most severe audio-necrophiles. SA



FORSAKEN

6:55 mins./www.tdotfilms.com

Antonio Galloro's theological horror *Forsaken* is an almost comical exercise in generic surrealism that asks the overly basic philosophical question, if god exists, why then is there so much suffering in the world?

Jesus and Lucifer meet in a darkening wood to contemplate a half-century of human horrors. While Satan reflects upon his handiwork with a gleeful and malignant pride, a bewildered and heavy-hearted Christ silently wonders why his god has forsaken him. With beautifully composed, sombre black and white images that glow with an unearthly light (somewhat reminiscent of Bergman's *The Seventh Seal*), *Forsaken* works much better as a demonstration of Galloro's talents as a cinematographer than as a stirring meditation on powerful, archetypal themes. SA



ROTTEN SHAOLIN ZOMBIES

23 mins./www.rottenshaolinzombies.com

As its title would suggest, *Rotten Shaolin Zombies* mixes gut-munching undead action with nut-crushing kung fu – and a lot of laughs. Director Blaine Wasylkiw's short concerns two devout martial artist brothers who happily spend their days kicking each other's butts. But when one of them is viciously attacked by a toxic "dirty lungfish" during a sushi dinner, he promptly drops dead and returns from the grave as a, well, rotten Shaolin zombie, thereby setting the stage for one last epic brotherly battle. Speaking of battles, the kung fu sequences are wicked fromagey fun that, for once, don't parody *The Matrix*. Performed with high camp by actors Wilson Wong and Wil Yee, *RSZ* is no-budget, tongue-in-cheek fluff that's hard not to like. NT





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REISSUES



The Devil's Backbone: The reason we respect Guillermo del Toro.

GUILLERMO'S GOLD

THE DEVIL'S BACKBONE (2001) DVD

Starring Eduardo Noriega, Marisa Paredes and Federico Luppi

Directed by Guillermo del Toro

Written by Guillermo del Toro,

Antonio Trashorras and David Muñoz

Columbia TriStar Home Entertainment

No matter what story writer/director Guillermo del Toro aims to tell, there's always an enchanting quality about his films that makes them beautiful and engaging. If you've ever been ambitious enough to dissect them, what you find below the surface

sometimes *just* beneath it – is a treasure of artistic elements and genres synthesized together in a flawless cohesion of cinematic and visual poetry. The new *Devil's Backbone* Special Edition DVD from Columbia TriStar is a consummate example of that

genius and an absolute necessity to any aspiring filmmaker.

I'm not going to waste words with a synopsis of the film because I'm assuming that if you're reading *Rue Morgue*, then you have the good taste to know and love this movie as much as we do. If you haven't seen *The Devil's Backbone*, you're sorely missing out, it's del Toro's masterwork to date and perhaps this review will encourage you to give it a chance.

Though the gorgeous new director-supervised transfer makes those glorious blues and ambers come alive, it's actually the commentary track that makes this disc so invaluable. Where the previous TVA release of *The Devil's Backbone* featured a commentary by del Toro and director of photography Guillermo Navarro that concentrated more on how the film was created and executed, the new track features a deeply personal discussion about the soft science that

guided the film and the artistry that made it so resonant.

Del Toro's articulate, solo elucidation functions like a lesson in art history, architecture and literature, drawing attention to minutiae you might have otherwise overlooked in the film, which only reaffirms his uncanny ability to masterfully choreograph those elements in his cinema. There isn't a single shot, set piece, design or line of dialogue in *The Devil's Backbone* that isn't completely deliberate and full of meaning.

From the grand architectural etchings of Piranesi and the influence of Luis Buñuel (the patriarch of cinematic surrealism) to Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* (in which a giant helmet lands in the middle of a patio and remains there throughout the story), del Toro discusses their significance to *The Devil's Backbone*. Over the course of the lecture, he explains – to exacting detail – how he transposed the elements of the Gothic romance novel, the classic ghost story, the Victorian fairy tale, melodrama, symbolist art and metaphor into the Spanish Civil War setting of the film.

Even the title, *The Devil's Backbone*, is an allegory for Spina Bifida – a congenital deformity of the spine, in actuality a result of malnutrition – understood by people during the time of the Spanish Civil War as children who were unwanted or not meant to be born. All of these details only galvanize our already massive interest in the sophistication of *The Devil's Backbone*. There simply isn't enough real estate in the magazine to discuss them all, so you'll have to take our word for it. Do yourself a favour, buy a copy and see for yourself why we admire and respect one Guillermo del Toro so damned much.

Jen Vuckovic

THE UGLY AMERICAN

UNCLE SAM (1997) DVD

Starring Timothy Bottoms, Leslie Neale and Bo Hoskins

Directed by William Lustig

Written by Larry Cohen

Blue Underground

One expects great things from William Lustig (*Maniac*) and Larry Cohen (*It's Alive*, *Q the Winged Serpent*). One doesn't get



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Uncle Sam: An ultra-frustrating coulda-been movie.

many of them in *Uncle Sam*, newly re-released by Lustig's own company Blue Underground with commentary tracks and other extras. It's one of those films that's noteworthy largely for the marquee value of the names involved, a veritable cavalcade of B-movie icons: Timothy Bottoms, Bo Hoskins, Isaac Hayes, P.J. Soles, Robert Forster and William Smith put in appearances, but all in vain.

It's the Fourth of July weekend in a Norman Rockwell postcard-perfect American town, but as the local citizenry prepare for their annual patriotic shindig, Sgt. Sam Harper – killed by friendly fire in the Gulf War – comes out of the grave with plans of his own. Flag burners, tax evaders, draft dodgers and other un-American ne'er-do-wells are dispatched in novel and nasty ways, and only Sam's impressionable young nephew can stop the carnage with a little help from a cynical war hero (Hayes).

Given Cohen's penchant for dark satire, *Uncle Sam* could have been – and evidently wanted to be – an incisive jab at American jingoism, but feels like little more than a botched attempt to launch another Freddy Kruger-type franchise villain, dressed up with some half-hearted, clumsy attempts at socio-political satire. Similarly, while the tone of the film is considerably lighter than *Maniac* (and yes, I realize that "lighter than

Maniac" leaves plenty of room for interpretation), Lustig is surprisingly ineffective here at generating anything resembling suspense.

Given its vintage, it's not surprising that *Uncle Sam* derives much of its tone from post-Gulf War cynicism, and yet if you're expecting any newfound resonance taking into account the events over the last couple of years in Iraq, well... don't. *Uncle Sam* is one of those ultra-frustrating coulda-been movies, a classic case of the sum amounting to considerably less than the parts. So what went wrong? Well, there's the paradox for you: an essentially cynical film that ultimately gets undermined by its own shallowness.

John W. Bowen

CRONENBERG'S CRIMES

FAST COMPANY (1979) DVD

Starring Tony Leung and David Morse
Written and directed by David Cronenberg
Blue Underground

In 1979, after making *Rabid* (RM#39) and before shooting *The Brood*, David Cronenberg made his "lost film," a drag racing cheapie called *Fast Company*. The asphalt soap opera involves an aging champion with an experimental engine battling various forms of corruption and sabotage to stay in

the winner's circle. It's got nudity courtesy of former Playmate Claudia Jennings, an assy '70s rock soundtrack, and little in common with the Cronenberg oeuvre, save for a John Saxon supporting role and a few obsessive shots of machinery.

It's a minor classic for racing enthusiasts, but since this isn't Rue Torque magazine, where's the draw? The first reason to actually buy this sucker is the *Behind the Camera* featurette with cinematographer Mark Irwin, which contains some hilarious stories from his Cronenberg collaborations, including one about *The Brood* where a drunken Oliver Reed scares the hell out of the five and six-year-old gymnasts who played the mutant rug rats. The other justification is the bonus disc of very early Cronenberg films *Stereo* (1969) and *Crimes of the Future* (1970).

Both movies, which are slightly over an hour long, star Ronald Mlodzik (*Shivers*, *Rabid*) and lay the groundwork for Cronenberg's long-time thematic obsessions. Also produced, shot and edited by the director, they're extremely cold, angular and academic. The black and white *Stereo* explores the "Canadian Academy for Erotic Inquiry" (don't get your hopes up, it isn't real), where hippies are subjected to experiments involving sex, telepathy and surgery.

Crimes of the Future is an investigation into the "mad dermatologist Anton Rouge", involving spontaneous generation of useless body organs, "perverse" telepathy, gynecological research, venereal disease, cosmetics, and something called "The Oceanic Podiatry Group". Place a gigantic effin' question mark here. It sounds weirdly fascinating but it's not unless you're a Cronenberg scholar. Granted, the young director's eye for composition is incredible, but it's about the only reason for the average Cronenberg fan to watch *Crimes of the Future*.

Incomprehensible "plots," long static shots, and voice-over-only sound clogged with academic-sounding jargon like, "sympathetic telepathic cohesion," will drive even completists mad. If you want horror, imagine the look on the drag racing junkies' faces after popping in that bonus disc.

Dave Alexander





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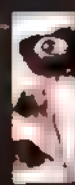
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I Drink Your Blood: A fun ride of unnecessary carnage.

THOSE KILL-CRAZY HIPPIES!

I DRINK YOUR BLOOD (1970) DVD

Starring Bhaskar, Tyde Kierney and Riley Mills
Written and directed by David E. Durston
Box Office Spectaculars

When David E. Durston was approached to make a horror film for exploitation movie magnate, Jerry Gross, he was given certain guidelines: it couldn't have any werewolves or vampires and it had to rival the success of *Night of the Living Dead*. After a great deal of brainstorming, Durston decided to avoid the supernatural altogether and go with a scenario based on a strong probability factor.

Here's what he came up with: a pack of Satan-worshipping hippies descend upon a sleepy mountain town to wreak havoc on the local citizenry. To get revenge for raping his sister and giving LSD to his granddad,

young Pete (Mills) feeds the long-haired louts a batch of meat pies spiked with the blood of a rabid dog. The virus goes to work almost instantaneously, turning the nasty flower children into even nastier flower children who embark upon such a relentless limb-severing frenzy, they make the Charlie Manson gang look like the Partridge Family.

As Pete's grandfather so wisely remarks, "What worries me is the fact that this here hippie group is on hard drugs. Coupled with the reaction to the rabies virus, it's bound to cause unthinkable complications." So, as you can see, the probability factor in this film is huge! Nevertheless, *I Drink Your Blood* is such a fun ride of unnecessary carnage, it almost classifies as the first feel-good movie ever made about demented, uber-trippin', kill-crazy hippies.

Originally titled *Phobia*, the name was changed in order to play on a double bill



with another Jerry Gross classic, *I Eat Your Skin*, spawning one of the most irresistible tag lines in the history of drive-in movies: "Two great blood-horrors to rip out your guts!" Even though it features absolutely zero instances of anyone actually drinking anyone's blood, Gross wasn't about to let an irrelevant thing like the story get in the way of a groovy title.

With the DVD release, *I Drink Your Blood* gets the royal treatment; a complete digital restoration, the theatrical and the director's cut, a ton of extras and surprise fiddlybits so extensive, it'll not only satisfy every curiosity you could've ever had for this grindhouse classic, but it'll leave you wondering if there's something more constructive you could be doing with your life.

Stuart Andrews

DUMB, GORY, MISOGYNIST FUN

NIGHT OF THE DEMONS (1988) DVD

Starring Cathy Podewell, Miki Kinkade and Linnea Quigley
Directed by Kevin S. Tenney
Written by Joe Augustyn
Anchor Bay Entertainment

Now this is the way I remember '80s horror: big-haired, bare-breasted, over-the-top and unashamed. *Night of the Demons* gets dismissed as a "typical" '80s horror movie – dumb, gory, misogynist and lame – but at least it has the balls to accept what it is and get on with the job of entertaining the hell out of us. If that sounds apologist, fine, because *Night of the Demons* is actually a cool movie.

If you've made it this far, you'll likely know the plot already; a bunch of teens get invited by goth babe Angela (Kinkade) to a Halloween party at Hull House, a mansion possessed by demons. One by one, the kids fall prey to the house's evil until only the virtuous and innocent are left alive.

Not too inspired, true, but what earns *Night of the Demons* minor classic status is its unexpectedly black sense of humour, memorable set pieces and total commitment to the concept. Producer Joe Augustyn's script pumps life into tired stereotypes like Judy the virtuous girl (Podewell, dressed none too subtly as the titular *Alice In Won-*

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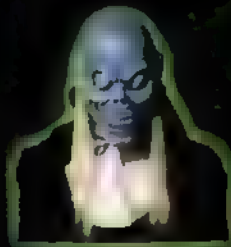
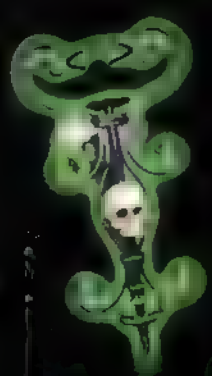
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derlund). Jay the preppie (Lance Fenton). Sal the rebel (Billy Gallo) and Stooze the party animal (Hal Havins). Combine this with demon Angela's dance to Bauhaus' Stigmata Martyr, Suzanne's (Quigley) lip-stick-in-the-breast trick, and an arch use of the ol' razorblade-in-the-apple gag and you've got one fun flick.

Kudos to Anchor Bay, they've done a great job of cleaning up the print and sound (although I still reserve a room in my heart for that beat-up, pan-and-scan VHS tape my friends and I rented from Blockbuster so many Saturday nights ago). Who knew that *Demons* was actually a well shot, stylish little movie?

This is no multi-disc Collector's Edition, but the supplements that are here are well done, especially *My Demon Nights*, a new fourteen-minute interview with scream queen Quigley, who comes across like your hot MILF neighbour. The commentary from director Kevin Tenney, executive producer Walter Josten and producer Jeff Geoffray is lighthearted and informative; these guys weren't trying to make art, they wanted to put butts in seats and they succeeded.

Sean Plummer

SO BAD, IT'S... OKAY

HAPPY HELL NIGHT (1991) DVD

Starring Nick Gregory, Laura Carney and Franke Hughes

Directed by Brian Owens

Written by Brian Owens, Ron Petersen and Michael Fitzpatrick

Anchor Bay Entertainment

As much as we here at *Rue Morgue* love Anchor Bay – keep those multi-disc George Romero special editions coming! – there's no denying that, at times, their capacity for misdirection rivals Houdini's. Example: despite the boasts of the DVD cover, *Happy Hell Night* does not star Darren McGavin (*The Night Stalker*), Sam Rockwell (*Matchstick Men*) and Jorja Fox (TV's *CSI: Crime Scene Investigation*). Together, these actors take up maybe ten minutes of screen time. Then again, the Bay has a movie to sell, and who's ever heard of Nick Gregory, Laura Carney or Franke Hughes?

Happy Hell Night (a.k.a. *Frat Fright*) certainly needs all the help it can get. It's a "rarely-seen slasher sickie" for good reason – it's really bad! The plot is no gem of originality; as part of the Frathouse Follies, a contest to commit the most outrageous Hell Night hazing prank, a couple of Phi Delta Kappa pledges must break into the local loony bin to snap photos of the maniac responsible for the slaughter of seven fellow frat brothers 25 years earlier. See where this is going? The demon-possessed priest escapes and goes on a killing spree at the frat's booze-soaked Hell Night party. Nubile bodies pile up as the surviving kids band together to send the black-eyed bastard back to Hell.

B-movie aficionados will revel in *Happy Hell Night*'s non-existent production values, bad acting and spot-the-incipient-celebrity status. McGavin's death scene is truly painful to watch, although I felt grateful that he was finally out of his misery. Rockwell, a great actor who has gone on to be directed by Ridley Scott, is seen briefly in a flashback and delivers just one line, but it's the

most convincing line reading in the whole movie. The gorgeous Jorja Fox, playing a smokin' party girl who meets a nasty end, smoulders admirably but doesn't have much to do except die.

So does this Canadian/Yugoslavian co-production have anything going for it? There are a few good kills, some Yugoslavian T&A and enough unintentional laughs to boost it into the 'so bad it's okay' section of your fright film collection. And that's no lie. Maybe.

Sean Plummer

VAPID AND VACANT

NINE LIVES (2002) DVD

Starring Paris Hilton, David Nicolle and Amelia Warner

Written and directed by Andrew Green
Lions Gate Home Entertainment

There's a lot of vacancy in *Nine Lives*. It's not just in the sprawling Scottish mansion where nine doomed friends gather during a snowstorm, though. The script is vacant of interesting characters; the plot is vacant of logic; the killings are vacant of originality. And let's just say if you look really close at co-star Paris Hilton's head you can see a tiny sign flashing "Vacant-Vacant-Vacant..."

Writer/director Andrew Green, who looks about twenty in the disc's bonus material, and his producers fall into that category of filmmakers probably more interested in making something profitable than watchable. *Nine Lives* is shot on 35mm, everything's in focus, and the lighting is pro. To their credit it looks pricier than its \$2 million budget.



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THE TRUTH IS NOT LIKELY OUT THERE

UNSOLVED MYSTERIES: GHOSTS

Starring Robert Stack
Written and directed by various
First Look Home Entertainment

NBC's popular series *Unsolved Mysteries*, hosted by the recently deceased Robert Stack, ran from 1987 into the new millennium and was inspired by classic shows like *One Step Beyond* (RM#35). The show tapped into our desire for "real horror", reporting on cases that covered everything from the disappearance of relatives, to murders, to UFOs and the paranormal. Unfortunately, with fewer and fewer interesting stories to cover, the writing on *Unsolved Mysteries* eventually wore down, becoming a dramatized version of the daily news.

First Look is now packing the series into several four-disc collections based around themes. In *Ghosts*, however, *Unsolved Mysteries* simply does not stand the test of time.

For what it's worth, the creators came up with some stories that seem original enough. With the exception of one case involving a female hitchhiker who suddenly disappears from the back seat once the driver reaches a certain cemetery, I had not heard of any of the stories recounted on this disc, which is really the only thing that lends them any credibility. Offered little to no evidence to support these reports,

we're left to believe in the testimonials of those involved, which are only mildly more convincing than those of the *Jerry Springer Show*.

In one case that seems to have inspired *The Sixth Sense*, a young boy's mother recounts how her son went into a catatonic state after he saw what turned out to be the ghost of his grandfather. Since then he had been visited several times by sinister ghosts. Medical examinations and even an exorcism had no effect; years later this boy still sees ghosts everywhere, with no explanation. The possibility that the boy might just be a big fat liar is never suggested.

Unsolved Mysteries will probably always be remembered as one of the more endearing shows in a long lineage of its kind and likely a major influence on today's "reality TV" programming. Still, it was never more than a cool TV show at best, something to watch on Sunday night and then talk about at school the next day. It hardly warrants a DVD release or repeated viewing. If real-life ghost stories are what you crave, do yourself a favour and pick up a book or two, or better yet, a copy of *Weird New Jersey*.

Aaron Lupton



It's also got a recognizable "star" in it, assuring straight-to-DVD profitability. Hilton stretches it by playing a snobby American socialite (although notably less naked than in real life). Thankfully, her blank non-performance is limited to about ten minutes of screen time.

There's little respite from the other lame-o characters, however. It's like the former schoolmates reunited at the secluded manor for some weird suicide pact where they bore themselves to death with insipid memories about getting drunk, and nonsense philosophy about the nature of reality being like dice in a cup on a backgammon board. Won't someone kill them? Please?

Trapped by a heavy snowfall, one of them eventually discovers an old book that unleashes an eyeless spirit named Murray – MURRAY!? Holy crap, even the ghost is boring. He jumps bodies, stabbing his victims in the gut or getting stabbed and then jumps into the body of whoever kills his host. The kids predictably and foolishly separate and wander around in the dark getting killed or killing, suspect each other when it's convenient, and then go down to the basement to find out why (only half!) of the lights are out.

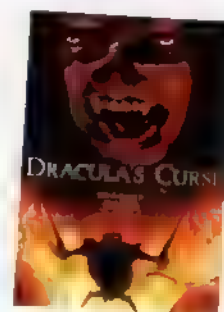
Nine Lives takes an already uninspired premise and rocks it to sleep. The only interesting thing about the relatively gore-free film is that one of the actors is named Lex Shrapnel. Lex Shrapnel! So much cooler than... *Murray*.

Dave Alexander

BLOODSUCKING BANALITY

DRACULA'S CURSE (2002) DVD

Starring Patrick Bergin, Giancarlo Giannini and Hardy Krüger Jr.
Directed by Roger Young
Written by Roger Young and Eric Lerner
Lions Gate Home Entertainment



Most horror fans know that Dracula's real curse is actually too many mediocre vampire movies. The latest pedestrian take on Bram Stoker's story is a 2002 Italian miniseries cut to 110 minutes for North American DVD release.

The tale takes place in modern Hungary where a group of friends must stop Vladislav Tepes – a.k.a. Dracula, a.k.a TV actor Patrick Bergin – from seizing control of Europe. Tepes lures Jonathan Harker (Krüger Jr.) to his Romanian stronghold with a lucra-

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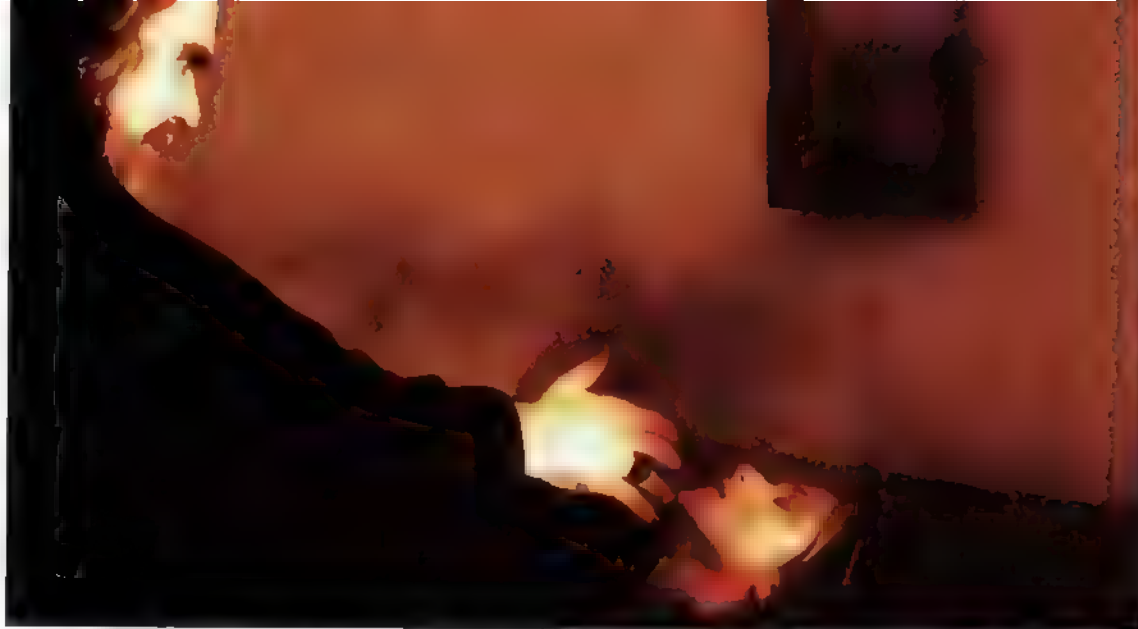
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Dracula's Curse: Dork factor at an all-time high.

tive business deal, but before the real transaction of turning him into his minion can take place, Harker escapes. The Count follows him back to England, bringing coffins of dirt to set-up safe houses throughout the continent, and goes after Harker's gal Mina after first sinking his teeth into her pal Lucy.

With the help of Dr. Enrico Valenzi, the Van Helsing character played by the perma-grizzled Giancarlo Giannini, the unlikely group goes on the offensive. There's a bit of a twist at the very end, but it's hard to care because most of the characters are rather bland, including Dracula himself. Stoker adaptations, in particular, require a vampire that burns with both passion and evil, but Bergin falls short. He's not terrible like Richard Roxburgh in *Van Helsing*, but with his slicked black hair and cheesy mustache, he bears an uncanny resemblance to Greek singer Yanni, who's scary in a very different way.

A lame '80s-style soundtrack and bad special effects only increase the dork factor (duck, digital bats!). There is one guy, however, who gives the movie some pulse. Little-known actor Brett Forest goes so far as to eat a live grasshopper while playing Drac's manic, institutionalized lackey Renfield. Unfortunately, Forest disappears halfway through the film, although two of his scenes are restored in the extras, including one where he eats dirt!

The other reason to consider *Dracula's Curse* a rainy day rental is the stunning old-Europe locations, including a leaky Gothic castle, decaying asylum, and a painting-quality opera house – all brought to life with lush atmospheric lighting. In other words: only hardcore Dracula aficionados, travelogue lovers and, uh, Yanni fans need apply.

Dave Alexander

KARLOFF'S DECLINE

ISLAND MONSTER (1953) DVD

Starring Boris Karloff, Giulio Battiferi and Renato Vicario

Written and directed by Roberto Bianchi Montero

CHAMBER OF FEAR (1968) DVD

Starring Boris Karloff, Yerye Beirute and Julissa

Directed by Jack Hill and Juan Ibanez
Written by Jack Hill and Luis Enrique Vergara
Retromedia

William Henry Pratt, you deserved better. Thirty-five years after his death, Pratt – a.k.a. Boris Karloff – remains a horror icon thanks to a clutch of memorable fright flicks. Remember *Frankenstein*, *The Mummy*, *Tower of London*, *The Body Snatcher*? Sure. How about *Island Monster* or *Chamber of Fear*? Of course not, because they are, arguably, the nadir of Karloff's extensive career.

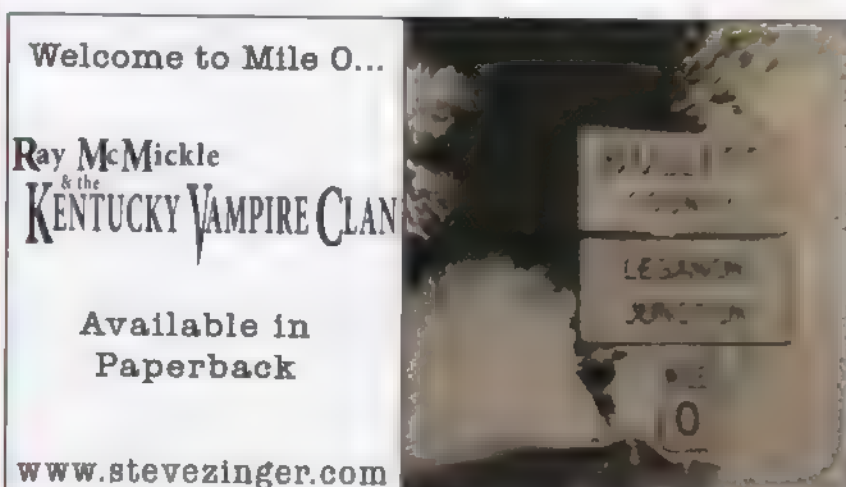
Island Monster, despite its misleading title, is no horror film. Horrible, yes, horror, no. Karloff plays Don Gaetano, a philanthropist on the Italian island of Ischia who supplies the island's sick children with medicine but uses the venture as a cover for drug smuggling. On his trail is a young married cop who goes undercover to bust the drug ring and gets mixed up with a glamorous femme fatale. Upping the "tension" (insert derisive laughter here) is the criminals' kidnapping of his young daughter.

Island Monster isn't even an entertaining train wreck. The dubbing is horrible (I'm convinced a Karloff impersonator supplied his dialogue), and the moral lesson – drugs are bad for you – is ladled on extra thick. Karloff, then pushing 66, remains a handsome, fit actor, although his character is underwritten and of secondary importance.

The second film in this double bill is *Chamber of Fear*, one of a series of Mexican films Karloff made before his death in 1969. Too ill to travel, his scenes were filmed in the States. As Dr. Carl Mandel, Karloff discovers a living rock beneath a volcano. But the creature feeds on fear so Mandel and his associates kidnap and terrorize young women in order to harvest the hormones produced only in a state of extreme terror. Predictably, the rock demands more and recruits Mandel's staff to supply it with more fear! Karloff, dying of emphysema and never far from an oxygen tank by this point, is rarely seen outside of a chair or bed.

No question, *Chamber of Fear* is a mess, with a pitiful script, non-existent production values and a monster you never get a good look at. It's entertaining only by virtue of its incompetence. Retromedia's "shocking double feature", well, isn't. These films only diminish Karloff and serve as a testament to the sad fact that being a legend doesn't spare an actor from having to degrade himself to keep working. You know the Karloff classics; remember him that way.

Sean Plummer



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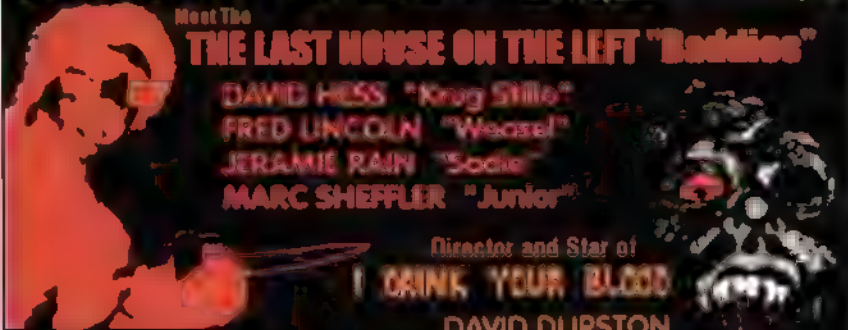
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SEX, GORE AND PSYCHOTROPIC DRUGS!

BY AARON LUPTON

It's hard to believe that just five years before Herschell Gordon Lewis was filming eyes torn from sockets and limbs hacked off in bathtubs, Elvis Presley's dance moves were considered too lewd for television! **H.G. Lewis** cemented his name as the world's most over-the-top exploitation filmmaker with a trademark style that was immediately addictive: cardboard acting, deliriously funny dialogue, tons of cheesecake and, of course, gruesome butcher shop gore that still rivals the likes of Peter Jackson, Tom Savini and Lucio Fulci.

Lewis earned his reputation as the **Godfather of Gore** with horror's first franchise: 1963's

Blood Feast, 1964's *Two Thousand Maniacs!* and 1965's *Color Me Blood Red*, and has since been a major influence on everyone from John Waters to the Misfits to Lloyd Kaufman.

The new **Herschell Gordon Lewis Collection**, courtesy of Something Weird Video, compiles six previously released Lewis films that, while less widely celebrated than the *Blood Trilogy*, are no less gruesome, bizarre, hilarious or irreverent. Each is digitally mastered, and includes audio commentary by the director and guests, various related shorts, trailers and exploitation art by the man who made exploitation movies possible.



THE GRUESOME TWOSOME

Starring Elizabeth Davis, Gretchen Wells and Chris Martell, 1967.

Lewis' first true gore film after wrapping up the *Blood Trilogy* two years earlier, *The Gruesome Twosome* sets the tone for a night of schlock with this totally bizarre tale of a murderous wig maker and her psychotic son. Viewers are treated to heaping portions of gore courtesy of an electric carving knife. What is truly great about this movie is the way it continuously goes off on tangents in which the female actresses break out into dance numbers instead of saying or doing something that might actually advance the plot. Even so, legend has it *The Gruesome Twosome* still did not meet its running time target and, to remedy the situation, Lewis shot a four-minute prologue of two wig mannequins engaged in a conversation that elaborates the plot, until one is abruptly stabbed with a pair of scissors. Included is an unintentionally funny short on the wig business in France.



notable for clocking in at nearly two hours (most Lewis movies wrap up after an hour and twenty minutes, and that's with the empty footage of dancing girls and extensive fondling of peoples' spleens). Nevertheless, it represents one of Lewis' only uses of a horror staple (the vampire) and tells the story of a successful businessman's transformation after ingesting some strange brandy from a late relative named Dracula. Completely lacking in violence, *A Taste of Blood's* appeal lies in its quirky dialogue which includes, among other things, a veiled reference to lost virginity which – like the gore of Lewis' other pictures – is simply shocking for its time. Also included is commentary by

Lewis and Vraney, along with a short black and white nudie of a voluptuous woman being chased through Dracula's castle.

SHE-DEVILS ON WHEELS

Starring Betty Connell, Nancy Lee Noble and Christine Wagner, 1968.

Not only does *She-Devils on Wheels* have one of the coolest titles in movie history, but it is reportedly also the first ever female biker film. One of six movies Lewis directed in the busy year of 1968, *She-Devils* can be construed as a fatal blast of feminine anger, or an excuse to show more outrageous gore and (fully clothed) orgies. Either way it is the women who control the action from beginning to end, with the men consistently on the receiving end of the blood and glue. The movie's garage rock title song, performed by Lewis and his son, would later fittingly be covered by The Cramps and is now a bonus track on 1986's *A Date With Elvis*. A short titled *Biker Beach Party* about a biker gang called The Aliens is the most notable extra here.

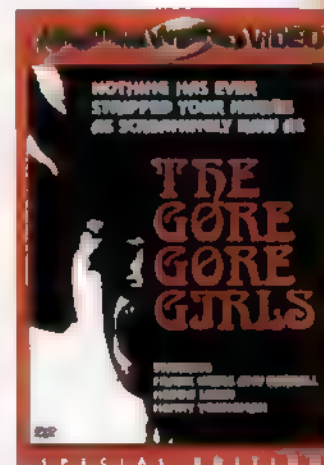


ask how this is supposed to work, just revel in the delight of the Grand Guignol-style murder pieces, including a double sword swallowing. The title of this film (a reference to Lewis' return to the realm of pure gore exploitation after a three year absence), would later be adopted by Tom Savini, who would begin his career just a few years later. The commentary track here between Lewis and Vraney is one of the most interesting in the series, as Lewis discusses some real obscurities in his canon, including a live theatre production called *Blood Shed*.

THE GORE GORE GIRLS

Starring Frank Kress, Amy Farrell and Hedda Lubin, 1972.

Just as his influence was beginning to usher in a new era for sleaze, horror and gore movies, Lewis gave the world what is perhaps his most over-the-top yet in *The Gore Gore Girls*, a sort-of slasher flick that boasted more sex and violence than any other film in the director's impressive filmography. As hysterically funny as it is shamelessly distasteful, Lewis' final outing (before his 2002 comeback sequel to *Blood Feast*) is honestly just as potent and shocking today as ever – and that's nothing to say of the film's infamous white/chocolate milk spurt scene. In his commentary Lewis is unapologetic, and after having already released a truckload of subversive schlock, why on earth would he be? At the film's end, we are given the following message: "We announce with pride... this movie is over!" Thankfully, Lewis' legacy is not.



SOMETHING WEIRD

Starring Tony McCabe, Elizabeth Lee, and William Brooker, 1967.

Something Weird, the film after which SWV owner Mike Vraney named his company, stands out from the pack as the only one in this box set to shy away from gore in favour of drug-addled, psychedelic weirdness. Combining witchcraft, ESP and LSD, the movie tells the story of an ugly old witch who grants folks rock star good looks in exchange for some supernatural lovin'. Still completely hokey

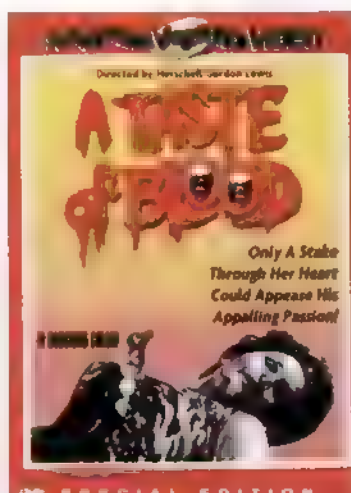
in its dialogue and effects sequences (including one in which a man is attacked by his bed bed-sheets), Lewis put more thought into this plot than perhaps any other, making it that much more of an oddity. The commentary track may disappoint as it is more a history of Vraney's company (delivered by Vraney himself) and has little to do with the movie.



A TASTE OF BLOOD

Starring Bill Rogers, Elizabeth Wilkinson and Thomas Wood, 1967.

Almost as atypical a Lewis film as *Something Weird*, 1967's *A Taste of Blood* is



THE WIZARD OF GORE

Starring Ray Sager, Judy Cier and Wayne Ratay, 1970.

One of Lewis' later efforts finds the director in familiar territory with lots of senseless violence and an inane script. Montag The Magnificent is a master hypnotist, so good that he can thoroughly massacre girls onstage with a punch-press and have the audience believe it is simply an illusion. Don't

OVERLOOKED, MISUNDERSTOOD, PREMATURELY CANCELLED, *MILLENNIUM* DARED TO BRING THE HORRORS OF SUICIDE, SATANISM AND SERIAL KILLERS TO NIGHTTIME TELEVISION. NOW, CHRIS CARTER'S BLEAK, PSYCHOLOGICAL CRIME DRAMA FINALLY GETS ITS DUE ON DVD....

WHEN THE WORLD ENDED

2247 324 277254 472444

BY SEAN PLUMMER



Remember the '90s? As the century wound down, premillennial tension gripped us. The apocalyptic writings of 16th century prophet Nostradamus gained widespread cultural currency, the phrase "Y2K" was coined, and the media spouted global warnings about how the failure of computers to recognize the year 2000 would result in imminent worldwide disaster. The planet was terrified.

Chris Carter, meanwhile, saw the world's increasing anxieties as an opportunity to take advantage of his own paranoia as a storytelling tool to craft *Millennium*, his fascinating follow-up to *The X-Files*. The perpetually underrated (and low-rated) show debuted in October 1996 and lasted just three seasons on FOX Television, compared to *The X-Files*' nine. *Millennium* starred Lance Henriksen, in his first recurring TV role as Frank Black, a former FBI profiler coping professionally and personally with the rise of evil as the year 2000 approached.

This summer, Fox Home Entertainment compiled all 22 episodes of the show's first season (arguably its best) onto six discs in one glorious box set that includes commentaries by Carter on the pilot and director David Nutter on the Gehenna episode, a documentary called

Order In Chaos: Making Millennium Season One, and a unique feature titled *Chasing the Dragon: A Conversation With the Academy Group*, a look at some of the real-life criminal profilers that inspired *Millennium*.

Millennium's roots lie in a second season *X-Files* episode titled *Irresistible*. The villain there, curiously, wasn't an alien or a supernatural entity but Donnie Pfaster, a monstrous but very human serial killer.

"It was interesting to tell an *X-Files* episode that didn't really have a supernatural aspect to it," Carter told *Rue Morgue*, "and it was still scary and good and psychological. So I thought: here's an opportunity to take advantage of the coming millennium — the fear about the millennium, the prophecies about the millennium — to tell stories like that one, which was so successful on *The X-Files*."

So Carter sat down during Christmas in 1995 to flesh out his basic concept of an FBI agent in Seattle solving crimes. But the hook that would sustain not only the audience's attention but his own as well, was missing. He was in Seattle doing research when the solution finally hit him.

"When I struck upon the millennial aspect, the scope of the project then became larger and more interesting to me," he says.

The result was *Millennium*, which revolved around Frank Black, a

after the singer of The Pixies, Carter's favourite band), an ex-cop and FBI agent who has moved his wife Catherine (Megan Gallagher) and young daughter Jordan (Brittany Tiplady) into a pretty yellow house in a quiet suburb of his hometown of Seattle (actually Vancouver). The neighbours are friendly, and Black believes he can keep his family safe from harm and from a stalker who mails him Polaroids of Catherine.

But true safety does not exist in Frank Black's world or, by inference, our own. He possesses an uncanny ability to climb inside a killer's head and use that knowledge to capture them, but it's a talent that pushed him into a breakdown. Now he works for the Millennium Group, a shadowy congregation of former cops and government agents who use the latest technology and psychological tools to help law enforcement track down evil, a job complicated by an increase in random violence as the millennium approaches.

Black is debatably Carter's most compelling character, more so than even *The X-Files'* Mulder and Scully. A legend, thanks to his extraordinary ability to almost see the crimes he solves, Black is unwavering on the job but doubts his ability to protect his loved ones from a world grown increasingly dangerous. Aggravating matters is his uncomfortable insight into the madmen he pursues and, conversely, their insight into him.

"[If the] killer has a logic and a rationale and a perverse beauty in his own mind to what he is doing, it is actually more frightening [than if there is no understanding] because you say 'oh, I see the way you think. Maybe I think that way, too,'" Carter explains. "That was always more interesting to me, and I always pushed to spend more time in the antagonist's head and see the world the way he sees it. The real scary thing in life is that there are people walking around who don't see the world like you and I, who act on those conceptions."

Carter seems reluctant to identify himself too closely with *Millennium's* beleaguered hero but admits to some similarities.

"Frank Black was always working in a world — particularly in the pilot — where people had objections to his point of view," he allows. "He would never stoop to sell people on it, and I think that I have a sort of similar quality. I just think sometimes it's futile to try to convince people, and that was the way Black worked, and that put a tremendous amount of [pressure on him] to often do the job alone."

**"THE REAL SCARY
THING IN LIFE IS THAT
THERE ARE PEOPLE
WALKING AROUND WHO
DON'T SEE THE WORLD
LIKE YOU AND I.
WHO ACT ON THOSE
CONCEPTIONS."**

CHRIS CARTER

Casting the crucial part of Black was, in fact, the easiest part of the process; Carter conceived the character with just one actor in mind: genre vet Lance (Aliens, Near Dark) Henriksen.

"He had a lean quality to him and a world-weary quality, in that he carries the weight of the world on his shoulders," Carter recalls. "That voice is so wonderful. I said to Lance, 'Don't use your hands when you're acting. Keep your hands at your side.' And he said, 'I can't do that.' To which I responded, 'You have to because it will detract from your voice if you start to gesticulate.' And he finally understood what I was getting at, but it really disturbed him at first."

While never gratuitously violent, *Millennium* did push the boundaries of what was considered acceptable TV carnage, from a Russian mobster getting his face blown off at close range (Maramatha) to Frank's wife finding a human kidney in her fridge (Lamentation).

"I hate violence on the screen, and I hate seeing blood on screen, I really do," Carter insists. "And everyone knew I was always trying to give you a hint of these things, suggest the violence that was always taking place off-screen. It's scarier that way."

This means that the show's most disturbing imagery was only ever briefly seen. And though *Millennium's* style was influenced both thematically and visually by David Fincher's disturbing film *Se7en*, Frank's especially violent, half-glimpsed "visions" have since inspired others and come to be part of TV's visual lexicon.

"I think if you watch *CSI* you'll see big influences," Carter points out. "And, in fact, the guy, Jonathan Littman, who runs that whole business over there now was the head of current programming for the FOX network at the time we did both those series."

Although the show was cancelled long before the actual millennium occurred, the story of Frank Black was resolved in a 1999 episode of *The X-Files* entitled, aptly enough, *Millennium*. These days, Carter's own influence continues to be felt. He is making progress on a second *X-Files* movie and, with the DVD sales success of Joss Whedon's cancelled series *Firefly* spurring Universal Studios to fund a big-screen version due next summer, don't rule out a *Millennium* movie if sales are similarly strong.

"You know, it's funny because I talk to Lance Henriksen about this all the time," Carter reveals, "and I actually have an idea, and he wants to do it. So all they have to do is ask."

Meanwhile, *Millennium* continues to exert its strange pull both on audiences and Carter himself.

"It actually made life scarier," he says of the show's impact on his life, adding that he was profoundly disturbed by seeing how good people's lives could be affected by other people's evil.

"For me, the reason to do the series was that you could be at the supermarket standing

next to an ordinary-looking person and be aware that person had the capability — and maybe even the intent — to go out and do tremendous mayhem, and yet they are among us. They are us, and we are them."

Look for Season 2 of *Millennium* on September 27th. ☹



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Bloodier than Mario Bava and twice as prolific as Dario Argento, LUCIO FULCI is perhaps the most revered, reviled, contentious and notorious Italian horror filmmaker ever. Two new reissues from Blue Underground serve as bookends to the most illustrious portion of Fulci's filmography.

MAESTRO OF THE MACABRE

by The Gore-Mel

Eight years after his untimely passing, Lucio Fulci remains the quintessential Italian horror director. A veteran filmmaker noted for his gialli and westerns, Fulci's first foray into the horror genre was an unofficial sequel to George Romero's *Dawn of the Dead* (1978), released one year after, called *Zombie* (known as *Zombi 2* in Italy), this consummate spaghetti splatter epic was Fulci's most

successful film. Over the next three years, Fulci churned out an astounding seven films venerated for their graphic violence and moody atmospherics – widely considered Fulci's golden years. But by the time *Conquest* hit the streets of Italy, in 1983, the sheen was gone. Fulci's career, and the Italian film industry, was in decline, victims of diminishing box office returns and shrinking budgets.

ZOMBIE (1979) DVD

For *Zombi 2*, Fulci reached past Romero and drew inspiration from Jacques Tourneur's *Walked With a Zombie* (1943), marrying Tourneur's sweltering tropical ambience to Romero's visceral set pieces. Fulci's exotic and gory voodoo zombie apocalypse ushered in the glory days of Italian splatter, and is his most enduring, cohesive, imitated and widely available film.

The influence of *Zombie* on the Italian film industry was immediate; *Zombi Holocaust* (Dr. Butcher, M.D., 1980) and

Contamination (1980), both starring Ian McCulloch, are unabashed rip-offs and gory zombie films like *Burial Ground* (1980) and *Hell of the Living Dead* (1981) are unashamed cash-ins. Producers of films like *After Death* (1988) incorporated the *Zombie* title and were passed off as sequels. Fulci signed on for the only official sequel, *Zombi 3*, but walked off the set, citing health problems. The extent of his contribution is a bone of contention to this day.

To date, *Zombie* has had numerous releases on VHS, laser disc and DVD. Anchor Bay released a remastered print in 1998 on VHS and DVD and, despite being a disappointment, the DVD was a complete sell-through. AB then announced the release of a new transfer in 2002, igniting a rights squabble that has alternately seen AB, Blue Underground and Media Blasters announce and retract releases ever since.

The new BU disc is the reissue of the year for sure, but hang on to your AB version you OCD-afflicted DVD-philes because BU recycled most of the extras from the AB disc, adding a second trailer, a poster and stills gallery, a whopping six audio tracks, the original mono, Dolby 2.0 and new 5.1 mixes, both in English and Italian with optional English subtitles, but it doesn't include McCulloch's commentary track.

Somewhere, there is also at least one battered print from legendary American distributor Jerry Gross that contains footage missing from the five different video versions I've seen, so the definitive version of *Zombie* still remains elusive.

CONQUEST (1983) DVD

Predating the giallo and the spaghetti western, the peplum – or sword-and-sandal film – was the first cinematic genre to be vigorously mined by the Italian film industry. Dozens of films featuring various incarnations of Hercules

were made between 1957 and '65. After the mighty *Conan the Barbarian* (1982) pillaged box offices the world over, the genre was briefly revived and a smattering of absolutely poverty-stricken sword-and-sorcery films appeared. *Conquest*, Fulci's follow-up to the miserable *Manhattan Baby* (1982), is the artistic nadir of his filmography.

To be fair, *Conquest* is typical of a genre noted for plots rooted in mythological hokum, risible hard-boiled dialogue ("My enemies call me Mace." "And your friends?" "I have no friends."), and execrable visual effects. Fulci creates a suitably mystical milieu, but excessive fog, soft focus and dim lighting obscures much of the action. His trademark gore effects are present, but it's apparent that he couldn't afford close-ups. Even the soundtrack from *Goblin* alumnus Claudio Simonetti is often overblown and inappropriate.

The limited commercial viability of this title reinforces Blue Underground's dedication to releasing superior editions of obscure cult titles. Presented in the original 1.85:1 aspect ratio, this is the best this film will ever look. Extras include a theatrical trailer, poster and stills galleries and a text bio of Fulci. ☹



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THIS FALL, UNIVERSAL UNLOCKED ONE OF THEIR DUSTIER, DUSTIER CRYPTS, AND GUESS WHAT CAME FLYING OUT WITH THE BATS? EVERYONE'S FAVOURITE FAMILY OF FRIGHT, **THE MUNSTERS!**

BUT ARE THEY GETTING THE REQUIEM THEY DESERVE?

RETURN TO 1313 MOCKINGBIRD LANE



The Munsters may not have been as creepy as *The Addams Family*, but they were the reigning champions of kooky. Audiences who tuned in to the show's first season in 1964 expecting only ghastly puns

instead found a clever sitcom satire that recast the nuclear family as bumbling silver screen monsters. The show, in fact, intelligently parodied the typical family sitcoms of the time, its opening credit sequence deliberately spoofing *The Donna Reed Show* and *Leave It to Beaver* with Lily Munster (Yvonne DeCarlo) seeing her gruesome family off for the day with kisses set to Jack Marshall's trademark opening music.

The Munsters were indeed a "special" family in the neighbourhood; Grandpa (Al Lewis)

played chess with ghosts. Herman (Fred Gwynne) had size 26 feet, Lily (DeCarlo) was over 120 years old and their son Eddie (Butch Patrick) slept in a coffin. It also rained incessantly over only The Munsters' house and their gorgeous (or gruesome depending on your point of reference) niece Marilyn (Pat Priest) could never understand why she kept scaring away potential suitors. Best of all was the household clock with the raven that told time and followed it with a "Nevermore." Our kind of place!

Unfortunately, those loveable, pun-spouting monsters only spooked the cathode tube for two short years (having been derailed by the all-colour *Batman* in 1966 competing in the same time slot on another network), but *The Munsters* nevertheless stole the hearts of millions and became one of the most popular sitcoms in television history.

This year, Universal finally releases all 38 episodes of the show's first season on DVD in

a fancy-looking metallic green box called *The Munsters: The Complete First Season*. And though they've surely got a veritable treasure trove of *Munsters* extras lurking in their vault, Universal – in a prodigiously dumb move – decided to leave all of them out, with the exception of the 15-minute colour pilot episode (the series aired in black and white).

Yeah, we know, we're supposed to be grateful to have the episodes at all but, ideally, this box could have contained both seasons (all 70 episodes), a hot rod Munsters coach full of extra features and perhaps even some of the better *Munsters* movies. Sadly, it doesn't, but the good ghouls over at Image Entertainment dusted the cobwebs out of their heads and put together a documentary that serves as a fantastic companion piece to Universal's extras-starved set.

Jen Vuckovic

THE MUNSTERS: AMERICA'S FIRST FAMILY OF FRIGHT Image Entertainment

The Munsters: America's First Family of Fright is a two-disc set that hits streets just in time for Christmas. The first disc boasts four 45-minute documentaries that originally aired on A&E's *Biography* – an overview of the popular series, followed by three intimate portraits of each of the main stars: Al Lewis (vampire patriarch Grandpa), Yvonne DeCarlo (his equally blood-thirsty daughter Lily) and Fred Gwynne (Lily's Frankenstein-like husband, Herman, who opened the show for typecasting him and

destroying his career). Although simplistic in their VH1 *Behind the Music*-style cycle of extreme highs and lows, each documentary is authoritative, and provides a vital look at *The Munsters'* impact on pop culture.

The second disc scares up some vintage TV appearances, promotional spots, and three versions of the ten-minute pilot, *My Fair Munster*. The first two feature original cast members Joan Marshall as Herman's wife Phoebe, and Happy Derman as wolf-boy Eddie. It's interesting to compare this early look at the Munsters to the final, much funnier version, in which the actors were replaced by DeCarlo and Butch Patrick. But by far the best featured extra is a Cheerios com-

mercial in which Herman accidentally tosses Eddie through a roof!

Despite some overlap between the documentaries and the supplemental material, *The Munsters: America's First Family of Fright* is a worthwhile addition for those disappointed with Universal's box set. Though the results weren't nearly as hilarious, at least *The Munsters* made better use of Universal's monster properties than *Van Helsing*.

Paul Corupe



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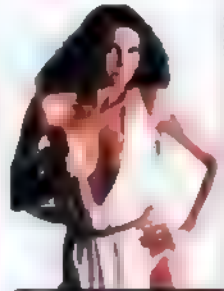
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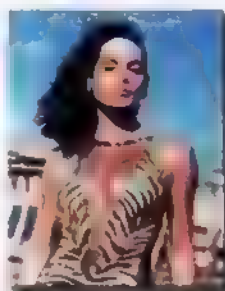
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SERIAL KILLING KIDNIE

THE BAD SEED (1956) DVD

Starring Nancy Kelly, Patty McCormack and Henry Jones

Directed by Mervyn LeRoy

Written by Maxwell Anderson

Warner Home Video

Kids are great. I love kids, I want kids. In fact, male or female, I'm gonna name my first-born Patty McCormack. She's the bloodthirsty brat from Mervyn LeRoy's prickly, pigtailed and perversely powerful pre-*Omen* rotten tot mini-camp masterpiece *The Bad Seed*. And goddamn, what a little terror she be.

Based on Maxwell Anderson's hugely successful play of the same name and directed by the mutha who helmed the *Wizard of freakin' Oz*(!), *The Bad Seed* spins the story of little Rhoda (McCormack), a sweet, happy ten-year-old sprite who also just happens to be a chronically disturbed psycho killer.

Living with her mother (Kelly) and frequently absent father (William Hopper), Rhoda waxes her giggly, cutie pie, dimple-cheeked charm ("a basket full of kisses and hugs!") while vehemently denying any involvement in the drowning death of a fellow classmate, and the fatal stair tumble of the nice old lady upstairs. Only one hombre is keen to her schemes – the scuzzy gardener named, believe it or not, Le Roy(!), who knows a serial killing kid-die when he sees one. Turns out mommy also has some genetic skeletons in her

closet that even *she* ain't aware of. The plot thickens, the melodrama rarely mellow and the whole soapy thing ends, not surprisingly, in tears.

Can you imagine seeing this sucker in the mid-'50s? Can you imagine the outrage at the ice cold depiction of a murderous mop-pet, shunned by her own mother and eventually picked off by nature itself? Well, keep imagining, because time has not been particularly kind to the tone of *The Bad Seed*. The film has a stagy, broad approach to its sombre subject matter that may have been de rigueur in 1956, but in 2004 might isolate many younger viewers.

If you can get past the theatrically-based melodramatic silliness and sink into the flick's unique groove, you'll be rewarded

tenfold. This is, in essence, a very disturbing and morally cold picture, due in no small part to McCormack's utterly masterful portrait of inherited evil. In fact, so upsetting was the movie during test screenings, that Warner Bros. imposed an absolutely ridiculous, howlingly funny coda following the end credits; a sort of "meet the cast" mess, with everybody, from slimeball hedge trimmer Henry Jones, to the too wise school marm coming out to take a grinning bow. Then if that idiocy weren't enough, McCormack skips into frame, and giggling, is spanked by a tittering Kelly while the whole thing fades to black! Unbelievable!

Warner Home Video's handsome new DVD is long overdue and, thankfully, retains the aforementioned ludicrous tacked on bum smack. Pick up this important film, watch it alone and marvel, then watch it again.

Ben Cortman



The Bad Seed: Melodramatic but morally cold.





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"STRIPPED OF THE CHEAP, VISCERAL THRILLS AND BASE PSYCHO-SEXUAL GRATIFICATION, WHAT IS THE ENDURING ELEMENT OF VIOLENT, DEPRAVED DEATH-OBSSESSED CELLULOID THAT HAS HOOKED ME WHOLE HOG?"

THE MAD MUSINGS OF A SCHIZOID

CINEPHILE

by Chris Alexander



Morgue reader, into my life, to see art through my eyes. And I do it truthfully, honestly and with hopefully entertaining fervor. So I feel I owe it to you... to tell you why.

Why horror? What is it that lured me to it and keeps me coming back for bloodsoaked seconds? What is it about horror films and literature that help define the very essence of my being? Stripped of the cheap, visceral thrills and base psycho sexual gratification, what is the enduring element of violent, depraved death-obsessed celluloid that has hooked me whole hog? Read on.

See, I learned at a young age what time meant. You lose your innocence the moment you clue into the fact that you won't be around forever. I would brood on this unsavoury revelation; I would look around me, at the people I loved, the pets I had, the

places I went and I realized that all the world is indeed a stage and we are merely players. It disturbed me, upset me to the core and above all, deeply depressed me.

But then one rainy Sunday afternoon, I happened to catch a little film that shocked my melancholy preschool soul. That film was Michael Reeves' *The She-Beast* (1966) starring my future horror honey Barbara Steele. I tuned in just in time to see a haggard-faced old bag

attached to some sort of Medieval dunking device, hovering over the shores of a river. The screaming, cursing, gnarled crone was dipped into the wet depths, then drawn out again... dipped, drawn, repeat, until eventually she sucked swamp and drowned.

I was clench-teethed, white-knuckled, shaken and stirred, and yes, utterly horrified. But after the requisite flashbacks and nightmares passed, I got to thinking about how lucky I was. Lucky and gladder than a garbage bag that I was *not* that soggy bee-yotch – thank *god* I wasn't her. Every minute that followed seemed to reverberate, seemed to have value. See, I *knew* that I would eventually die; my mom and dad would feed slugs and granny would be taking a dirt nap. But they were still alive. They weren't like that drowning witch, they were free, mobile, affectionate and ALIVE!

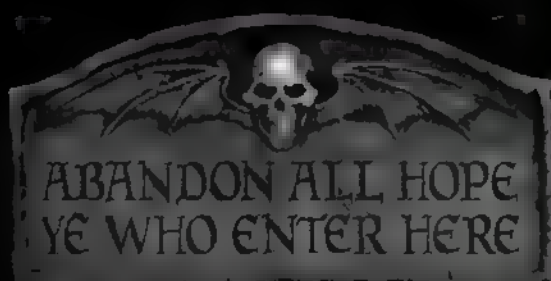
So horror, to me, isn't just a fly-by-night fan-boy passion – I can honestly say that it has charted the course of my life, making me a better man. When the house lights dim, when the innocent, the guilty, and the morally checkered meet their respective violent demises, I come out secure in the knowledge that my number isn't up... yet. I have mastered the fear of my own mortality and in doing so, greased my way out of the reaper's crippling grip.

The irony? After helming *The She-Beast*, director Reeves' made two more films before overdosing on a deadly cocktail of barbiturates and booze. Goddamn, if only he paid attention to his own wet icon of death, perhaps he'd be sitting with me in a darkened theatre somewhere, devouring fistfuls of oily popcorn, happy to have a heartbeat while watching some chick get strangled by her own guts. *La vita è sanguinante e bella, capretti!* Alexander out. ☺

Dear not-so-gentle readers: I know you know me, I know you read me. I know you have come to expect my words to be as fast and trashy as the guilty pleasures that I so lavishly praise. But there is another side to your Schizoid Cinephile, dimensions of character that remain buried within these bloodstained pages. I've always tried to let you, the *Rue*

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IN THIS ISSUE!

- MAN-THING #2 (OF 3)
by Rodionoff and Hotz Marvel
- THE MILKMAN MURDERS #2 (OF 4)
by Casey and Parkhouse Dark Horse
- REMAINS #5 (OF 5)
by Niles and Dwyer IDW
- PLANETARY:
LEAVING THE 20TH CENTURY HC
by Ellis and Cassaday DC/Wildstorm
- THE RAIL #2 (OF 4)
by Zemble, Niles and Jones Dark Horse

Whoever knows fear burns at the touch of the *Man-Thing*! Certainly, a catchy tagline. Alas, over the course of three decades and at least as many incarnations, *Man-Thing*, Marvel's version of "the boggy man", never came close to realizing its potential. Like many of the company's pulpy '70s horror titles – including *Tomb of Dracula*, *Ghost Rider* and *Werewolf By Night* – the *Man-Thing*'s adventures into fear tended to go too heavy on the monster, too light on the macabre and too damn bad in terms of plot and characterization. But if the first two issues of the retooled comic are any indication, then *Man-Thing*'s, ahem, burning issues have been addressed in a skilful balancing act from writer Hans Rodionoff.

"This series is meant to act as a bridge between the '70s *Man-Thing* and the newer incarnation," says Rodionoff, adding that the comic is a direct prequel to the upcoming movie, which he also scripted. (How's that for consistency?!) "The *Man-Thing* is not the protagonist now. The '70s comic spent a lot of time inside its head as it shambled around. There would be captions like: 'Watching the woman enter the diner, you are reminded of someone you once knew, long ago, when you had a different name, a name that has almost been forgotten.' Great fun, but I'm more I'm interested in how normal people react to its terrible presence."

The comic's protagonist is instead an insurance claims adjuster; dispatched to a swamp development site to evaluate acts of eco-terrorism, he soon learns that it's more of a case of eco-terror. Given that the swamp itself lurches to life here, comparisons to *Man-Thing*'s cousin at DC, *Swamp Thing*, are inevitable.

"There is a similarity in what *Man-Thing* is doing in the miniseries and *Swamp Thing*'s control of the Green, but the similarity ends there," Rodionoff promises.

And for the record, this new *Man-Thing* was clearly more influenced by the work of H. P. Lovecraft. (No surprise, given that Rodionoff wrote a demented



Man-Thing: Marvel resurrects its classic boggy man



speculative biography of the equally demented author, released earlier this year as the Vertigo graphic novel *Lovecraft - RM#37*) It's a natural fit for both the ominous swamp environment and the monster's menacing, tentacled body composition. And it's a descriptive linking device that comic artist Kyle

Hotz gleefully goes to town with. In terms of birth of character, Rodionoff says that neither the comic nor the movie act as full origin stories.

"*Man-Thing* is directly related to its environment in the same way that the mutated grizzly bear in *Prophecy* is related to the mercury poisoning in the

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water," he allows. "All will be revealed, but in time – horror is more effective when the details are as ambiguous as possible."

And if all will indeed be explained eventually, does this mean that a full-on *Man-Thing* comic series should be expected in 2005?

"There are certainly more stories to tell," he says, "but I don't think *Man-Thing*'s meant to be a monthly book. Generally speaking, horror comic books work best when they have a finite timeline, when you don't know if any of your protagonists are gonna make it to the end of the series. But yes, I'd like to do more!"

Clearly, Rodionoff doesn't just understand fear – he knows it. Here's hoping Marvel appreciates exactly what they've got on their hands here, and that none of us end up getting burned by the new *Man-Thing*'s touch.

QUICK CUTS

The Milkman Murders creates an extremist suburban nightmare that by no means does anything that hasn't been done before, but does it uglier straight across the board, purposely invoking every dysfunctional neighbourhood cliché that's out there and turning the dial to 11, arguably even 13!

The Vale family lives, as the series' tagline states, on the "dark side of the American dream." Sure, mother Barbara keeps a nice house, but blue-collar husband Vincent is a physically abusive cokehead, daughter Ruthie is a nymphomaniac high school senior with a taste for teachers, and younger son Fletcher is a budding serial killer at the cat-skinning stage. A typically non-communicative North American household, their TV is always on, endlessly broadcasting the looking-glass answer to Barbara's beyond-disappointing life, a '50s-era family sitcom called "Leave It to Mother."

Riveting art from Steve Parkhouse tempers writer Joe Casey's sublimely ridiculous

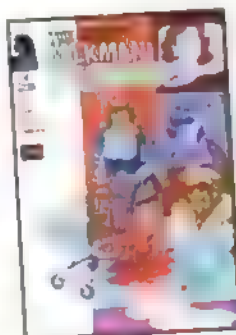
proceedings with a grounding (and desperately needed) face slap. This is not to suggest that Parkhouse delivers a Norman Rockwell pastiche, as the anchor, rather, he walks an intentionally hideous line between drab, warts-and-all realism and *MAD* magazine cartooning.



Forget about Vegas – the all blood-and-guts-and-explosions conclusion to Steve Niles' mini undead epic proves that America's divorce capital, Reno, is the real city of sin. So what remains at the last-zombies-standing end of *Remains*? A minimalist character study built around four people, two of which evolve and two of which devolve, to slightly unexpected but unilaterally pleasing results.

The early issues of this comic suffered for lack of any protagonist to root for. The "good guys" – blackjack dealer Tom and stripper Tori – made for an unlikely post-apocalyptic Adam and Eve, given their annoyingly incessant disdain for each other's company.

As with any good drama, jealousy, greed and betrayal finally rear their ugly heads, with issue #5 sending the former lovers to their separate corners, marked by the labels "good" and "evil". Sepia-toned art by Kieron Dwyer conjures a dust-in-the-air atmosphere that you can taste in your teeth; it also infuses the undead with a unique rust-coloured hue, craftily suggesting dried blood by the bucketful.



Charting the secret history of the world is no small task, which goes some way to explaining why the endlessly imaginative series *Planetary* manages to embrace science fiction, horror, crime, pulp adventure and superhero comics under the same genre-crossing title. What it doesn't explain is how this schizophrenic book remains so awe-inducingly consistent from issue to issue. Credit clearly goes to the Brit bad boy writer Warren Ellis, whose knowledge of mytholo-

gy and pop culture is second to none, and whose knack for tempering jingoistic dialogue with quirky mannerisms keeps his team of "archaeologists of the impossible" just on the right side of credible.

The third hardcover collection, *Leaving The 20th Century* (issues #13-18) maintains the series' perfect score in terms of bringing a fresh perspective to old characters, including spot-on postmodern updates of Dracula, Sherlock Holmes, Tarzan and the Fantastic Four. Peerless artist John Cassaday recently won the 2003 best penciller/inker Eisner award for some of the incredibly detailed work included here (his nomination also covered contributions to *Hellboy: Weird Tales*).

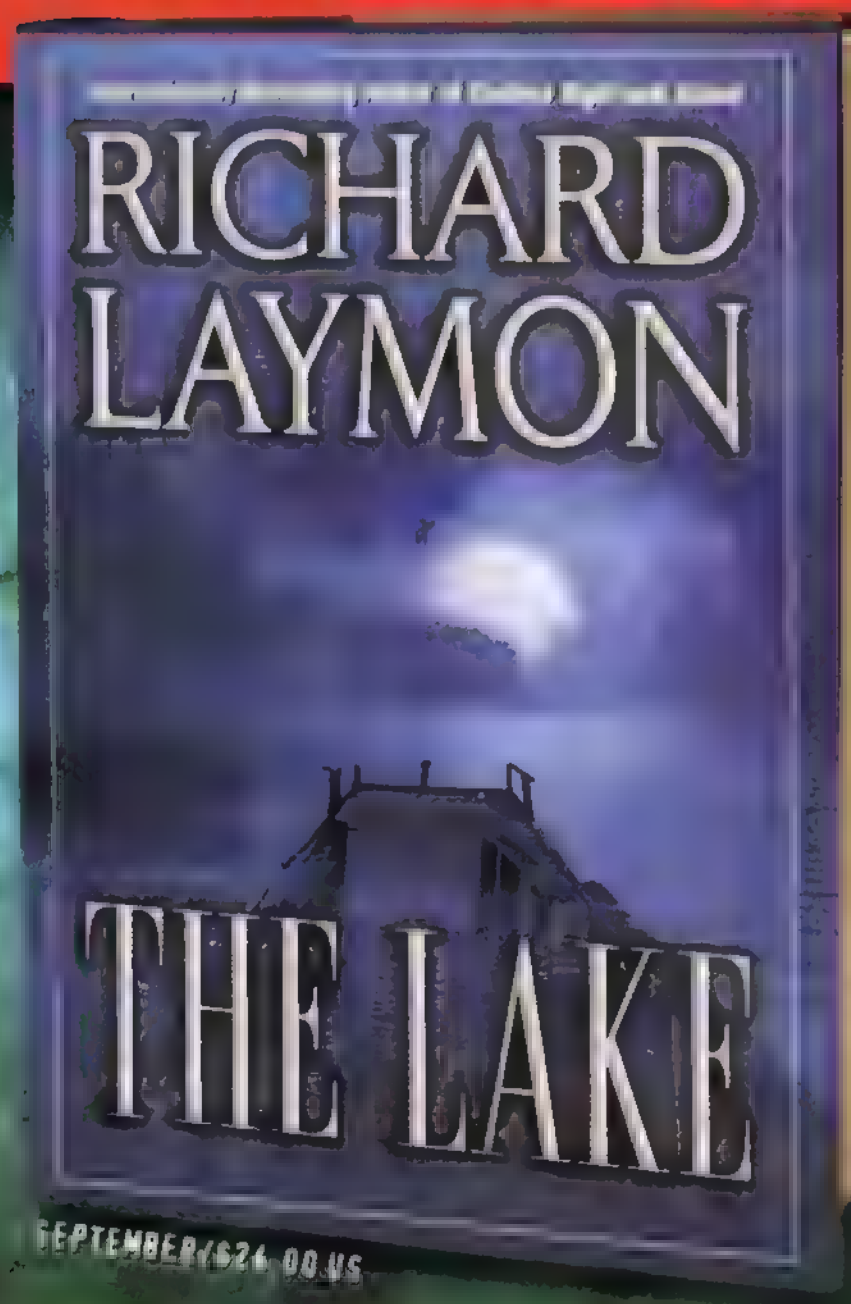
If you whooped and hollered watching *House of 1,000 Corpses* massacre the legacy of a certain *Texas Chainsaw*, then you'll love the way that *The Nail*, a four-issue miniseries by Rob Zombie, takes a blind stab at another '70s survivalist horror classic, *The Hills Have Eyes*. After all, the only thing better than a family on an RV trip getting lost in the cannibal badlands is when their wrong turn lands 'em smack in the middle of a Satanic biker forest.

The first issue was notable for the stupidest decapitation scene, like, ever, but issue #2 "tops" that achievement on its second page alone, as a rape victim tells her story and the layout does switchbacks between her wide eyes and her naked breasts! For people who like their dialogue vapid, their suspense telegraphed, their trash white and their turkey pre-chewed.

Note to penciller Nat Jones: you remain a truly creative horror artist, and you imbue this defiled story with legitimate atmosphere that it did not earn. Note to "co-writer" Steve Niles: I defy you to provide proof that you did anything more than spell-check this book. ☹



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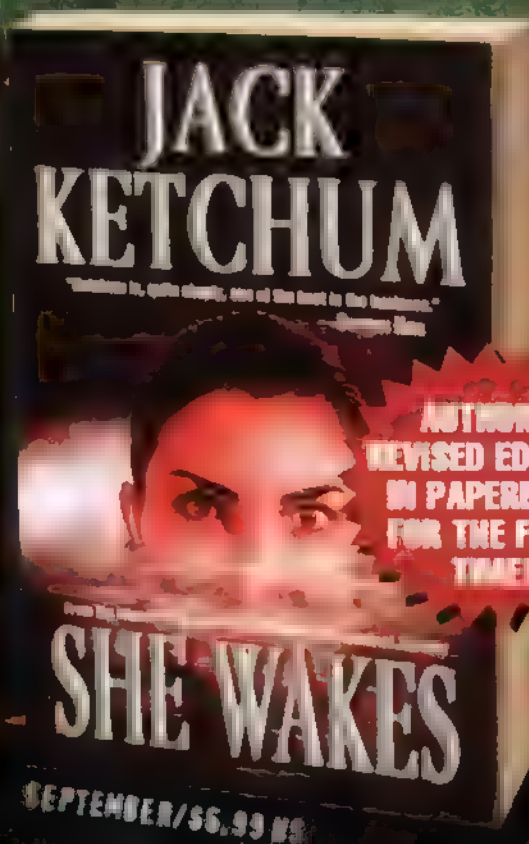
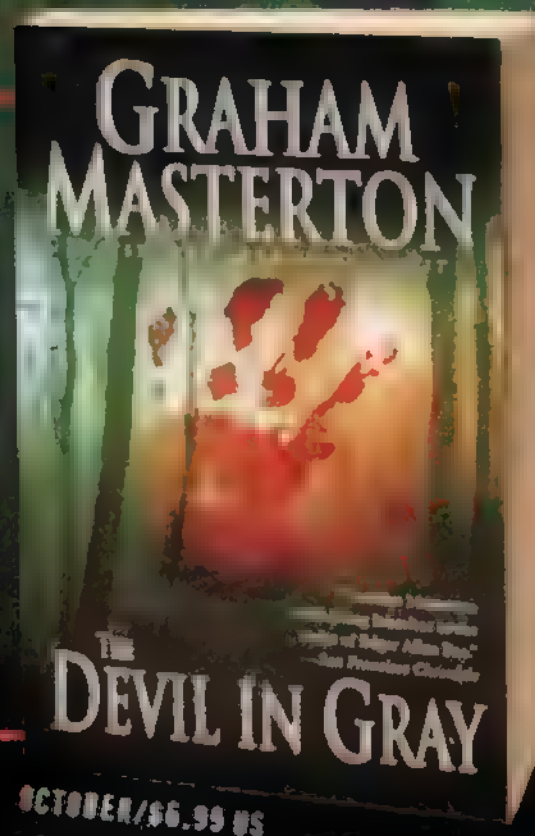
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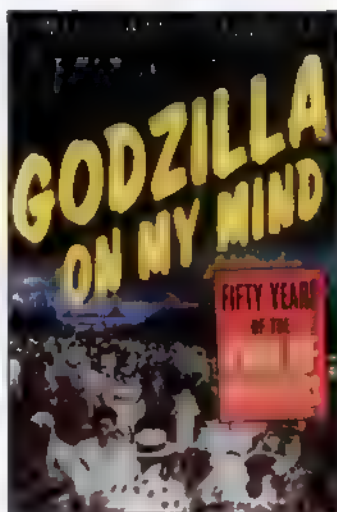
A European snooze • mindful godzilla • the poetry of horror



Alternative Europe
Ernest Mathijs and Xavier Mendik, eds.
Wallflower Press

Whyohwhyohwhy? I should love this book, but I don't. *Alternative Europe* is a series of essays and analyses of European exploitation and sexploitation penned by highbrow intellectual types seeking to turn inadvertently brilliant B-movies into snooty, chin-stroking, A-list film school fodder. Coulda been, shoulda been, wasn't, isn't.

Example: Giovanni Lombardo Radice (a.k.a. John Morghen), Italian gore cinema's answer to Bruce Campbell, a cult actor who also happened to get graphically offed in pretty much every flick in which he appeared – Fulci drilled his brains out, Deodato humiliated and cut him to ribbons, and Lenzi ripped his willy loose from the roots... good times, good times. Leave it to Patricia McCormack to spend an ENTIRE CHAPTER discussing the strange, latent homosexual desires of Italian directors to ruin Radice's flesh. She goes on to essentially accuse the actor of having a masochistic bent to destroy himself. Radice himself dismisses these claims as preposterous, simply stating that many of said victim roles were given to him because the first and second choices crapped out and he had to pay the rept. That doesn't stop our intrepid scribe, though; she manages to take such primal, surrealist delights as *The Gates of Hell* and



Cannibal Ferox and turn them into textbook gobbledegook. Where's the passion, woman?!

Similarly, I.Q. Hunter tackles Frank (Dawn of the Mummy) Agrama's little-seen UK DeLaurentis rip-off *Queen Kong* and, instead of having a blast with the near brilliant incompetence of the project, decides to explore the film's socio-political, gender-bending politics. It's QUEEN-fucking-KONG ferchrissakes! To top it all off, the book calls itself *Alternative Europe* and has the gall to put Jeffrey Combs in *Re-Animator* on the cover. Okay, Chuck Band had his Italian studio ties, but c'mon, that one's a true blue Yankee film!

Whatever. The best thing about this book is Jean Rollin's full-blooded, sweeping foreword, where he lays down his love for B-films and the cinematic freedom they provide. Linnie Blakes' bit on Jorg Buttgereit is pretty good too. The rest is a pretentious snooze. Leave it on the shelf and buy *Immoral Tales* instead.

Chris Alexander

godzilla on my mind: fifty years of the king of monsters

William Tsutsui

Palgrave Macmillan/St. Martin's Press

My most vivid childhood Godzilla memory is of attending a summer library screening



of *Bambi Meets Godzilla*. Stupid kid that I was, I thought this was an actual, full-length monster movie. Instead, I got a two-minute cartoon wherein the grazing doe gets stomped on by Big G. (This is the same seven-year-old who tuned in TV's *The Joker's Wild* game show to see Batman's nemesis.)

Go ahead, laugh. William Tsutsui would understand. The University of Kansas' associate professor of history has a profound empathy for Godzilla and his millions of fans worldwide. In *Godzilla On My Mind: Fifty Years of the King of Monsters*, the life-long G-fan examines the many films and their impact using language that is entertaining, accessible and thoughtful.

Not that thinking – Tsutsui acknowledges – is necessary to enjoy Godzilla. With 1954's big-budget *Gojira*, the notoriously cheesy series may have begun as sombre and provocative with allusions to the dangers of technology and human arrogance, but it soon degenerated into cheap monster mashes that provoked more groans than screams. Even so, both monsters – the angry stomping Tokyo lizard and Japan's comic avenger – helped shape culture at home and abroad.

The historian in Tsutsui dutifully recounts the radioactive behemoth's origins as Toho studios' response to the profitable likes of contemporary creature features such as *King Kong* and *The Beast From 20,000 Fathoms*.

The Grim Reader

Unleashed: Of Poltergeists and Murder

The Curious Story of Tina Resch

William Roll Ph.D.

and Valerie Story

Paraview Pocket Books

Stephen King may have dreamed up *Carrie*, but in 1984, parapsychologist William Roll was studying what may have been her real-life equivalent. *Unleashed* is the true story of the chaotic phenomenon that surrounded telekinetic teenager Tina Resch. Presented so methodically, it threatens to raise doubt in even the most stoic of skeptics.

Monica S. Kuebler

Attack of the B Queens

Jon Keeyes, Ed.

Luminary Press

Attack of the B Queens compiles an assortment of essays on horror and exploitation movie icons from Faye Wray to Pam Grier to Jamie Lee Curtis. Features an intro by Roger Corman, interviews with cult figures like Tura Satana and articles by B-movie luminaries Debbie Rochon, Linnea Quigley and Brinke Stevens, all of whom turn out to be surprisingly solid writers.

John W. Bowen

Long Horn, Big Shaggy

Steve Vernon

Black Death Books

The Wild West just got a whole lot wilder! *Long Horn, Big Shaggy* takes gun-totin' cowboys, their horses and even buffalo and gives them an unabashed zombie makeover. The undead West meets the black sorcery of the future in an unforgettable Texas showdown between the unwashed, brain-munching masses.

Monica S. Kuebler

Bunnywith:

My Book of a Thousand Bunnies

Alex Pardee

www.eyesuckink.com

Pardee's comic book-style manifesto is a hysterical mishmash of bunnies in bizarre predicaments. Examples: *Bunnywith Exposed Brain*, *Bunnywith Scissors In His Eye*, *Bunnywith Stillborn Parasitic Twin*, you get the picture. Features art by Pardee and many guest artists such as Grls Grimly and Liz McGrath. Independent, alternative and exceptionally cool.

Jen Vuckovic

NO RUE MOEGUE



Godzilla On My Mind: Giant lizard love in the form of an academic treatise.

He also details the diminishing creative returns of the many sequels and how the late '50s/early '60s dip in Japanese movie attendance (damn you, television) compelled Toho to make the fire-breathing lug more appealing to kids – their most loyal customers. Hence were born the atrociously dubbed monster-wrestling disasters many of us grew up with and became irrationally fond of.

But what makes Tsutsui's treatise readable and compelling is his personal stake. He outs himself as a Godzilla geek from page one and passionately explains Big G's personal and cultural appeal. Yes, Tsutsui says, in one way Godzilla was Japan's protector during its demilitarization and American occupation post-WWII; in another, he's just a big cool monster who smashes Tokyo real good. Call him cultural icon or childhood friend, Godzilla – Tsutsui successfully argues – is whatever you want him to be.

Sean Plummer

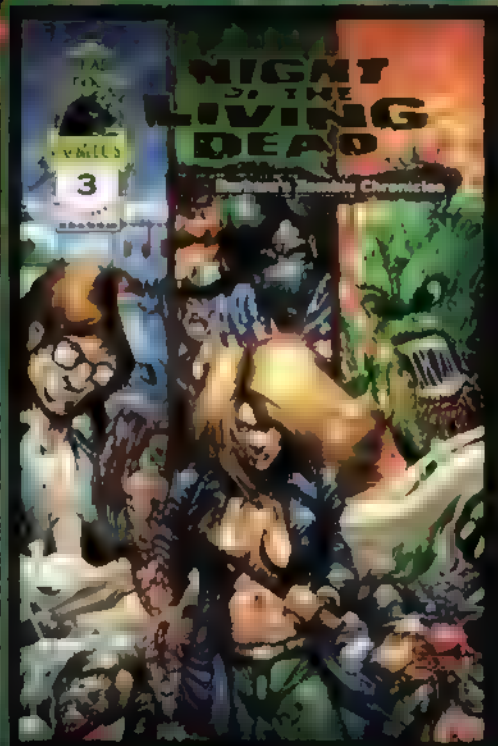
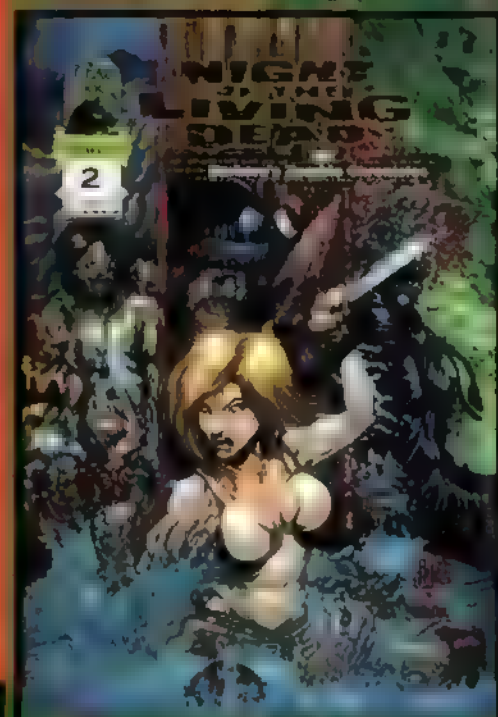
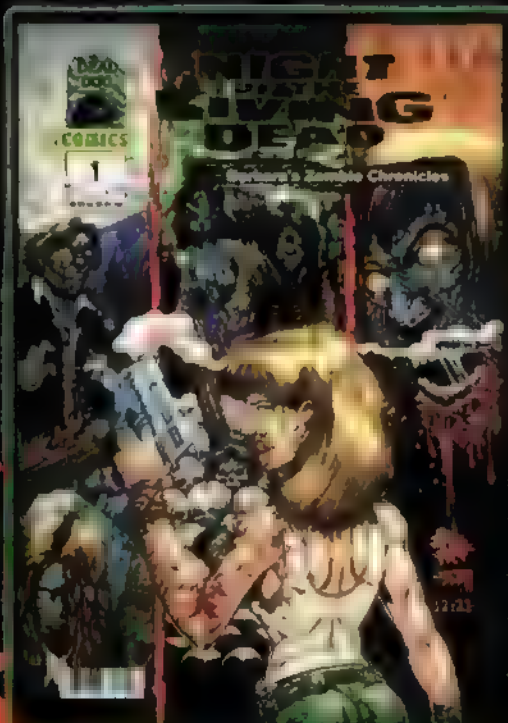
The Devil's Wine

Tom Piccirilli, ed.

Cemetery Dance

For some people, poetry is horror. But it doesn't have to be the stuffy stuff dissected in high school. As contributor Elizabeth Massie writes in her bio page for *The Devil's Wine*, "poems have the power, in their brevity, to be more visceral, more immediate, harder, lighter, truer, more painful, funnier."

This excellent anthology of poems by horror authors offers all of the above. Editor Tom Piccirilli invited his genre faves to submit any kind of poetic work, horror-themed or not – so not all of these pieces are meant to give shivers. (Unless, like me, you find nothing quite as horrific as rhyming couplets about Wal-mart or cat haikus.) But they do offer a rich, personal glimpse into the twisted brains of many top horror writers.



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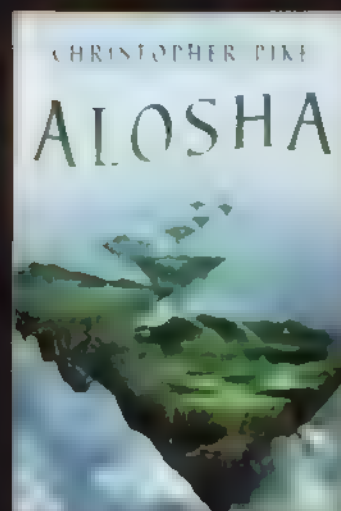
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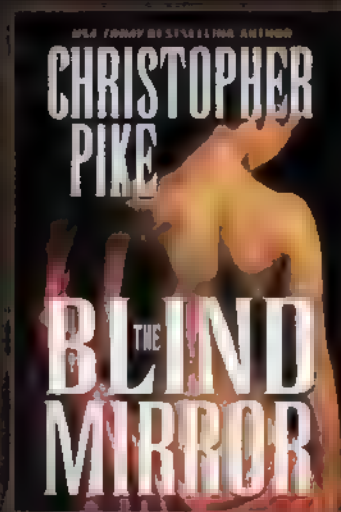
—Publishers Weekly, editorial review, on Campbell's *Part of the Woods*



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—Booklist on *The Blind Mirror*



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Blood Road: Van Belkom's refreshingly gross vampire novel.

The real draw is six poems by Stephen King, written in the late '60s/early '70s and rarely reproduced. With playful language, *The Dark Man* sets the tone for King's life's work: a mysterious character ruminates on the "savage sickle moon" and "the suck of shadows" before succumbing to his demons. *The Hardcase Speaks* and *Harrison State Park '68* pulse with vivid passages.

Surprisingly, there is little cryptic, gothic romance in this collection, which I suppose is better than too much of it. Instead, *The Devil's Wine* offers a sharp sense of modern-day horror. A few monsters, but mostly the sadness and despair of knowing too much about life and death.

Ray Bradbury, like many of the contributors, finds horror mostly in the passage of time, exploring memory and aging in free verse; younger Edward Lee brings a sexier, more urban edge; while husband and wife

team Steve Rasnic Tem and Melanie Tem deftly define the night. Her "sepulchral body and shadow of body aghast at the world it must make its way through" is a personal favourite.

Piccirilli's own work ends the book, and it's a highlight. His sixteen lengthier poems are perfectly paced, like sharp short film scripts. His characters are weak and wicked, his rhymes budgeted for maximum effect. And you can thank him for making *The Devil's Wine* a captivating read from beginning to end. Available from:

www.cemeterydance.com.

Liisa Ladouceur

Blood Road

Edo van Belkom

Pinnacle Books

Vampires, despite their inherent bloodlust, have always been dashing, almost romantic figures in the world of horror fiction. From Bram Stoker's classic *Dracula* to Anne Rice's popular

Interview With the Vampire, the figure of the vampire is more apt to evoke images of gothic elegance than horrible viciousness. With his newest novel, *Blood Road*, Canadian horror author Edo van Belkom (*Scream Queen*) has set out to shake up this long literary tradition, or more to the point, cut the bullshit – his bloodsucking antagonist is just about the most hideous, disgusting, and decidedly real vampire you'll ever have the pleasure of meeting between two covers.

Blood Road is the story of Amanda Peck, a young woman sick and tired with her dead-end job as a waitress and her deadbeat alcoholic boyfriend who has recently turned physically abusive toward her. She decides to escape her miserable existence, and hitchhikes along the Trans-Canada Highway, accepting rides from kindly truck drivers – only one trucker cruising the highway isn't so kindly. Konrad Valeska, a modern-day working-class vampire, is picking up young women one by one and leaving them by the side of the road dead and drained of their

blood. Soon enough, Amanda finds herself strapped down in the back of Konrad's eighteen-wheeler, she with a tube in her arm and he feasting from it.

With *Blood Road*, van Belkom has crafted an engaging "anti-vampire" tale that is as refreshing as it is gross... and gross it is. Believe me, there are scenes in this book that would make even the most hardened gorehound's stomach churn, and that's a compliment. Like his previous novel *Scream Queen* (RM#32), the book chugs along at a lightning-fast clip, and while it is just as fun, this one lives in a considerably darker, more nightmarish world – this is van Belkom at his most gleefully sadistic, and it just might be the Bram Stoker Award-winning author's most frightening and disturbing work to date. Add to that strong, believable characters, chilling atmosphere, and a vampire that'll make your skin crawl, and *Blood Road* is must-read horror.

Nathan Tyler

The Last pentacle of the sun: writings in support of the west memphis three

M.W. Anderson and Brett Alexander

Savory, eds.

Arsenal Pulp Press

Ever read Stephen King? Listened to Metallica? Wore black? Be glad you don't live in West Memphis, Arkansas, where this is a crime punishable by death. I'm not joking.

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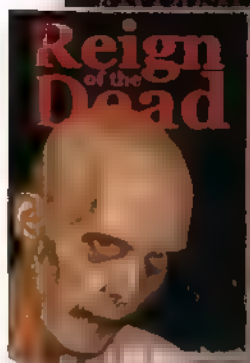
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Reign of the Dead Apocalypse End

Len Barnhart
Universe, Inc.



Oh, George Romero, what hath thou wrought? For every inventive Romero-inspired movie, there are a dozen – pardon the pun – brain-dead zombie movies churned out, each paler than *Night of the Living Dead*'s shambling corpses. And the phenomenon isn't limited to film. Author Len Barnhart's *Reign of the Dead* and its sequel, *Apocalypse End*, bring Romero's "world overrun by the undead" concept to the printed page, and the results, while gruesome, aren't pretty.

Reign of the Dead's familiar set-up finds regular Joe Jim Workman returning to civilization after a weeks-long woodland vacation only to find the world overrun by zombies. Is it a man-made virus? God's wrath? No one knows. The few survivors have banded together against the undead threat but their situation is perilous. Meanwhile, a group of soldiers and scientists holed up in a well-stocked mountain military site try to figure out what has happened and how to stop it even as they jockey for power in the post-apocalyptic world. And then there's Reverend Peterson, an evil preacher leading a troupe of troubled teens against the survivors. Good people die, bad people are ripped apart, and the undead just keep coming as the three plot lines collide.

Apocalypse End finds the survivors of *Reign of the Dead* by the mountain hideout, and anxious to find others. But Workman's expedition to Tanger Island, the source of a faint radio signal, leads him into the clutches of Hathaway, a racist militia leader eager to impose a new world order upon civilization's remnants. Will the Mount Weather survivors make it to the paradise of Tanger Island? Will Dr. Sharon Darney figure out the zombie plague? Will I get through this book without clawing out my eyes?

Barnhart is an enthusiastic writer, but enthusiasm doesn't excuse a failure of imagination. Rather than coming up with anything original, he cherry-picks his plot and characters from Stephen King's *The Stand* and George Romero's *Dead* films. (The news that Leonard Lies, *Down of the Dead*'s "machete zombie," is attempting to bring Barnhart's novels to the screen isn't surprising – *Apocalypse*, especially, reads like a script-play, with extensive zombie action set pieces.)

The editing is also inexcusably horrible (the word is "recognition," not "recognizance"). Connoisseurs of purple prose should note that a prequel, *Outbreak*, is due next year. Just what we need: more brain-dead action... and I ain't talkin' about the zombies!

Sean Plummer



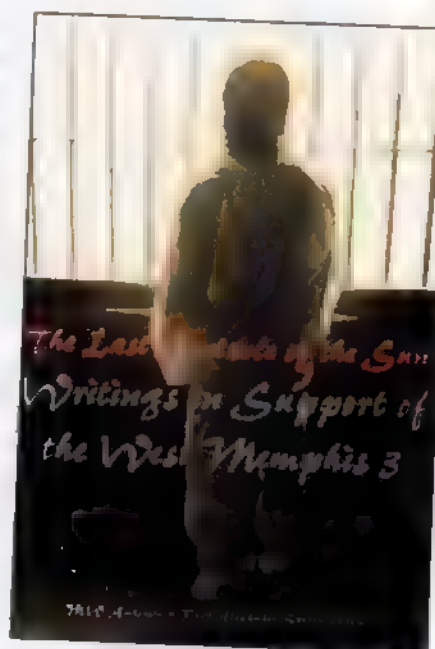
such a horrible crime must be Satanists, and they all knew just how to tell one: horror books and heavy metal. I don't know if the West Memphis Three (as they came to be known) actually killed those kids but I do know they didn't get a fair trial. They remain unjustly imprisoned; one of them on death row. It's a sicker plot than any horror auteur can summon.

The Last Pentacle of the Sun is an anthology of dark fiction and essays to raise money and awareness for the WM3 appeals. Contributors include Clive Barker, Peter Straub and Poppy Z. Brite, plus many up-and-comers. Barker's nine drawings are a standout; unsettling, with bold, black strokes, his portraits of people and creatures (including himself) have alienating eyes, asking you to question your own perceptions of the face of evil. Brite's *Night Story*, co-written with Caitlin R. Kiernan, is a reprint, but the tale of what lurks in the woods is a fittingly creepy kickoff to the collection.

Not surprisingly, *The Last Pentacle*'s fiction explores themes of crime, punishment and prejudice. *PissPot Bay* by Elizabeth Massie takes a chilling first person look into unjust arrest; *The Three Strangers* by Gerard Houarner is a fantastical glance at corrupt law and revenge.

Nevertheless, while the stories are all good reads, the essays vary. There's a well-researched piece on Satanic panic dating back to *Weird Tales*, and then some juvenile writings on how much it sucks to be a freak in high school. The most striking inclusion, however, is an open letter to Stephen King and Anne Rice written by Mara Leveritt, asking why they've not voiced their support for the West Memphis Three who, after all, were persecuted for reading their books. Good question. Maybe they're waiting for volume two?

Liisa Ladouceur



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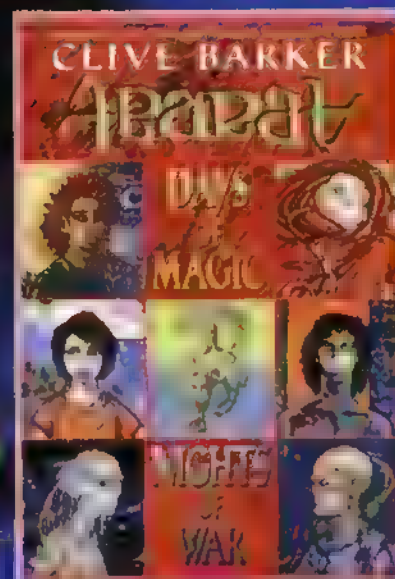


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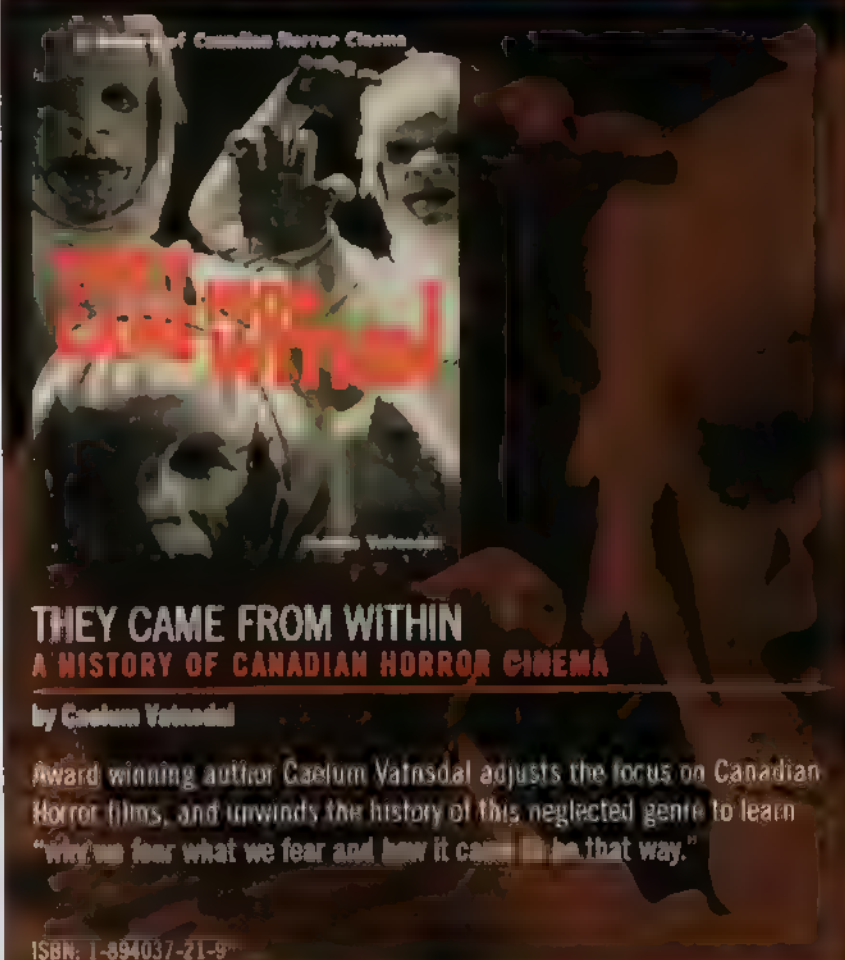
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A teenage girl is tied up in a suburban basement bunker, routinely beaten, burned with cigarettes, raped, knifed, and sexually mutilated by her own aunt and neighbourhood children. Sound familiar? This is the horror of the six-o'clock news, of every serial killer biography ever made, of the extreme fiction of **JACK KETCHUM**.

WORDS THAT WOUND

by Monica S. Kuebler

Two teenage girls make camp in the woods when, without warning and in a sudden hail of bullets, one's face explodes in a bloody burst of broken teeth and grey matter. The other takes six slugs to the head and torso and is left to slowly die – macabre dinner theatre for her murderer as he calmly waits for his friends to return to help clean up the mess.

No doubt, Jack Ketchum manages to embrace the perverse madness of humankind in a manner which few authors dared until he arrived on the scene in 1980 with the inbred, cave-dwelling cannibalism of *Off Season*. Since then, he's amassed a literary artillery of stories that are extremely graphic and unflinching, rarely granting readers reprieve from the stark and terrifyingly realized violence, of which, evisceration and brutal rape are just the beginning. Put simply, this is some seriously sick shit.

"I prefer to write about the 'monster inside man'," Ketchum told *Rue Morgue* in a recent interview. "That's because 'he's' in my face. The supernatural never did anything bad to me, ever."

From his earliest works, Ketchum – who started writing under a pseudonym to protect himself from public backlash – has been turning that very sentiment on readers by forcing "him" into our faces too, stretching the boundaries of what is considered acceptable in the genre in the process.

Oft-censored and poorly-marketed as a result of the graphic (and at times porno-



graphic) nature of his work, it took nine years and the publication of his utterly disturbing *The Girl Next Door* for the industry (if not the horror-consuming public) to acknowledge the remarkable and ferociously defiant talent they had lurking in their midst.

Ketchum's breakthrough novel caused so many ripples after its publication that it ended up under the micro-

scope of everyone from critics to academic digests like *Modern Studies in Horror*. *The Girl Next Door*, in under 300 pages, managed to leave a much-deserved, permanent scar on horror literature. This brutally powerful work masterfully combines the incumbent innocence of childhood with awakening puberty and a crime so shocking that it could seemingly only happen in fiction. Right? Wrong. And that's perhaps why, upon first reading, *The Girl Next Door* feels so tragically real – because many parts of it were.

Ketchum culled the story from a real news item about a young girl (Sylvia Marie Likens) who had been tortured, sexually-fetishized, mutilated and eventually beaten to death in an Indianapolis basement in 1965. He then transposed the grisly events into the landscape of his own, comparatively innocent, childhood memories of growing up in a neighbourhood not at all dissimilar to the one in the book. In fact, he used his childhood home – sans underground torture bunker – and that of his

neighbour's as the template for the two key households.

"I need to feel a story before I write it," Ketchum explains. "Maybe that's why I write so little comparatively speaking. I'm always working off real experiences and feelings as the basis of what I do, grafting them into and onto 'coincidence.'"

Ketchum is also quick to point out that anything from news stories to overheard bar conversations and plots from television and films can inspire his work. It is this importance given to times and locales, that elevates Ketchum's material above mere horror fiction. Part of his genius is that he takes relatively monochromatic backdrops and weaves them into very fabric of the plot, whether it be the deceptively wholesome mentality of the '50s in *The Girl Next Door* or the wooded seclusion ex-vet Lee Moravian holes himself away at in *Cover*, or the New York City attitude worn in *Ladies' Night* – a story in which the West Side finds itself bathed in ultra-violent pandemonium after the accidental spill of a military-designed chemical weapon.

Terror may be delivered Russian roulette random in Ketchum's fiction, but what's even more shocking than those splatters of blood red senselessness is the face he ascribes to such brutality. As in *The Girl Next Door*, antagonists in the Ketchum universe are often children or teenagers with a bizarre propensity for violence. They are people who make a decision to indulge in the morbid curiosities most people only feel for brief moments, then allow to pass. In *The Lost*, for example, teenager Ray opens fire on two female campers just because he's *curious* about what killing another human being might feel like.

"Kids are unformed humans forming," Ketchum elaborates, "not exactly blank slates because of genetics and whatever, but largely capable of turnings, and turnings interest me."

And if you think the passage of time might



WARNING!

TRAVELOGUE OF

SALEM, MASSACHUSETTS

by Heather Adler

Visiting Salem is a lot like eating all your Halloween candy in one feverish sitting: at first, it's totally awesome, but by the end you're puking up Pop Rocks and harbouring some serious disdain for all things orange and black.

Known as being the epicentre of the witch trials and occult hysteria that occurred back in 1692, today Salem celebrates the horrors of its past with glass-eyed wax dummies that pass as faux museums and novelty shops that hock a Disneyesque version its history. In between all the kitschiness, however, there is another Salem, or, more intriguing Salem—it's just tricky to find it from beneath all the shtick.

Located just outside of Boston, Massachusetts, this somewhat tacky, devil-revelling town is an economical \$3.75 train ride along the Rockport Line, which arrives every hour. Salem itself is quite small, and because nearly every inch of its downtown is some kind of attraction — or hokey, witch-inspired atrocity — it's best explored on foot.

Within a few blocks of the train station you'll find the Salem Witch Dungeon (16 Lynde Street), the Salem Wax Museum (228 Derby St) and the Salem Witch Museum (Washington Square),

which all recount the same information in almost identical skits and displays. Talking dummies, blood-splattered displays and ominous recordings inform tourists about how this once sleepy, God-fearing, puritan seaport brought the devil to its banks.

Legend says it all started when a Barbadian-born slave named Tituba — who belonged to Samuel Parris, the minister of Salem Village — began holding secret meetings to discuss strange tales of Voodoo with the minister's nine-year-old daughter, Betty, and eleven-year-old niece, Abigail Williams. The pair of troublesome tots began displaying eerie, *Exorcist*-style neuroses, which included random weeping, blasphemous screaming, barking, hissing and assorted abnormalness. The girls were swiftly diagnosed as being under the spell of "the evil hand", and once they began supplying the names of their so-called tormentors, the blood-bath began. Parris and Williams went on to accuse 150 people of witchcraft, nineteen of whom were hanged at Gallows Hill. By all accounts, they revelled in the power they exercised, finding it amusing to send innocent victims to torturous deaths; Williams would admit years later that she had done it all "out of sport."



Once you get past all the ghost walks, magic shops and pirate museums that make the town come off like a tacky New Age mall, there are some truly eerie pieces of history to be discovered here. Salem has preserved the graveyard where the witch trial victims are buried (18 Broad St), which is just as creepy as it is historic, and there are glimpses of rich heritage scattered in the streets. Pagan shops still fight battles with fundamentalist Christians, who have been known to form human chains to stop people from entering the wicked dwellings. Modern-day witches like Laurie Cabot (located at 63R Pickering Warf), who is known as the official witch of Salem, are available by appointment for authentic tarot readings and witchcraft classes. And every Halloween, thousands of Pagans and Wiccans descend on the city to honour their heritage and take part in a celebration, best described as a gothic Mardi Gras, which takes over the entire downtown.

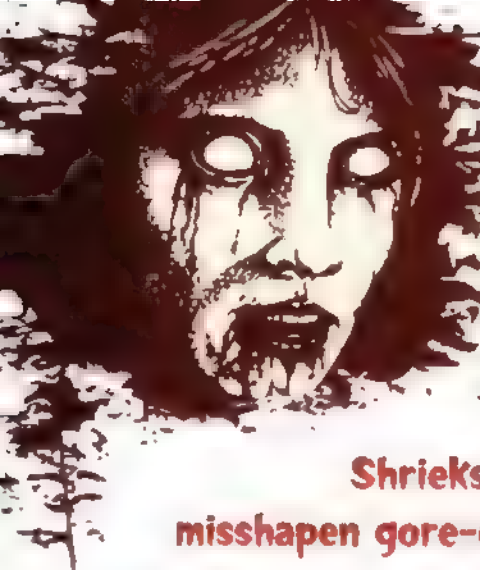
Visitors can also go out to the Salem Village Historical District, located on the northeast outskirts, where several sites that played a direct role in the hysteria have remained intact. There you'll find the Salem Village Parsonage, an archeological site where the home of Reverend Samuel Parris was located, the Ingersoll Ordinary, which is the original location of the witchcraft hearings, and a memorial that lists the hysteria victims as well as their haunting last words.

Salem is a city with a split personality: on one hand it's a charmed place with an elusive history and a large occult community, on the other it's a tourist atrocity with all the sanctity of a B-rate slasher flick. The key to enjoying it is to find the Salem you're looking for, or you'll find yourself swearing off Pop Rocks and pointy hats for good.

More info: Salem Office of Tourism,
877-SALEM-MA. ☎



Salem: Witch trial victims graveyard and (right) The Salem Witch Museum.



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UNBORN BUT FORGOTTEN (2002) DVD

Starring Jun-ho Jeong and Eun-ju Lee
Directed by Chang-jae Lim
Written by Hyeon-geun Han
Asia Video Publishing Co. Ltd.

The ghost story and the female horror demographic has not been well served over the past couple of decades, but the new wave of atmospheric Asian horror films is rectifying this void in creepy chick flicks. Single horror geeks take note, *Unborn But Forgotten* (a.k.a. *Hayanbang*) is perhaps the best horror date film since *The Changeling* (1980, see pg. 27).

Unborn But Forgotten is a gorgeous and melancholic Korean horror film in the vein of *A Tale of Two Sisters* (2003), that somewhat side-steps the clichés the plot embraces. Soo-jin (Lee) is a television reporter filming a documentary on a cyber detective investigating the deaths of young women who become pregnant

and die fifteen days after accessing a mysterious website for an abortion clinic. After viewing the site, Soo-jin must uncover the mystery before becoming the next victim herself.

A killer website, a ghost – there is nothing new in this film. But once again, palpable atmosphere is wrought from a masterful combination of music and cinematography. Horror films are about effect, not logistics (or originality). The greatest films in the horror genre can be torn apart through simple logical analysis, but this isn't why we watch these films, we want to be scared, and I'll be damned if this film didn't thrum the ol' hackles.

THE UNBORN (2003) DVD

Starring Intira Jaroenpura, Prangthong Changdham and Khrunpol Tiansuwan
Written and directed by Bhandit Thongdee
Edko Video Ltd.

With the Pang Brothers' film *The Eye* (2002, RM#32) leading the pack (look for the Tom Cruise-produced Hollywood remake next year), Thailand is an emerging force in world genre cinema. Bhandit Thongdee's derivative, heavy-handed entry carries little cultural baggage and also seems destined for a nigh-inevitable North American remake.

Porawee (Jaroenpura) is a nightclub bartender with a drug habit who is beaten and left for dead in a swamp by her abusive boyfriend. She awakens in a hospital to discover that she is pregnant and haunted by the ghost of a young girl whose unborn child was cut out of her murdered body. She must avenge the ghost and reunite her with her wayward fetus.



Whether homage or theft, Thongdee exacts a generous five-finger discount from previous horror films, notably those of Dario Argento. Elements lifted from *Suspiria* (1977), *Inferno* (1980) and *Phenomena* (1985) are glaringly obvious. Thongdee's recycling of the ghost from Hideo Nakata's *Ringu* (1997) and the shocking suicide leap in Kiyoshi Kurosawa's *Kairo* (2001,

RM#40) is downright plagiarism.

The script is a puritanical, pro-life diatribe, at times overwrought and about ten minutes too long, but none of this detracts from the end result, which is a stylized and scary horror film. In fact, I nearly cried at the end. ☹

"To my new son Christopher:
I'm your father. Sorry
about that."



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REVIEWS BY CHRIS ALEXANDER, TOMB DRAGOMIR, ROD GUDINO
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DAWN OF THE DEAD

Various

HEXACORD-AMERICA.COM

Ah yes, "Unreleased Soundtrack Music from George A. Romero's *Dawn of the Dead*." If you're a Dead-head, then this album is pretty much a must-have, no matter what I say from this point on. So I guess I'll confine myself to the facts: opens up with goofy mall music (a tune called — get this — The Gonk) and progresses from there into that sublimeness forever married to the visuals of classic gutmunching. Aside from the cool factor, this is the only way to live with the film when you're not watching it, so what are you still doing reading this? **RG** ☠☠☠☠

Score



TERROR TRACT

Brian Tyler

LALALAND RECORDS

I had never heard of a film called *Terror Tract* starring John Ritter (may god rest his sitcom soul). Someone slipped me a copy of this CD, the soundtrack to the aforementioned double T non-classic; the cover looked awful and the album was composed by one Brian Tyler(?). I expected squat but squat ain't what I got; in fact, Tyler's *Terror Tract* tracks are incredible

Orchestral

Danny Elfmanesque symphonic doom sonatas, very intense, elegant and somewhat playful. I did a bit of research on the Tyler kid and ended up biting my cynical, arrogant, sarcastic tongue. This lad was behind the chilling *Frailty* score... love that one. But then again, he also had something to do with *Darkness Falls*, so I unbit my tongue a tad. At any rate, turns out *Terror Tract* is a TV turkey from 2000 that I will never watch but I really dig the music. So will you.

CA ☠☠☠



VAN HELSING

Alan Silvestri

VAN HELSING —

THE LONDON ASSIGNMENT

John Van Tongeren

DECCA RECORDS

Here's a concept: take an artistically destitute blockbuster and develop an animated film from it to flesh out the backstory. Ergo, Alan Silvestri's *Van Helsing* and John Van Tongeren's *Van Helsing — The London Assignment*. Silvestri interprets Stephen Sommer's commercially crass vision in the only way he knows: make it work. His score is bombastic and beautiful, bursting with rhythm, drama, colour and full-bodied themes. Sadly, like the film, it strays only lightly into any territory that could be construed as horrific, which — considering the finished movie — ultimately means he did his job well. John Van Tongeren's *Van Helsing — The London Assignment* was apparently the better film (all 30 minutes of it) and the soundtrack is more interesting

Classical

and certainly creepier in a high strings and woodwinds kind of way. Aspiring composers could learn a thing or two from this one; though it stays loyal to the rhythm of cartoon animation, there are some interesting tidbits along the way **RG**

Van Helsing ☠☠☠

The London Assignment ☠☠☠☠



NOX ARCANA

Synth Symphony

Darklore Manor

MONOLITH GRAPHICS

The folks who brought you the Gothic Tarot and *Dark Realms* magazine try their hand at spooky music on a concept album loosely based on a haunted Victorian mansion that once loomed over the town of Gloucester, Massachusetts up the coastline from Salem. *Darklore Manor* is gothic at heart and relies heavily on thick incense-laden synths, tinkling pianos, church organs and demonic chants for effect. The project bears strong resemblance to the music of Mid-

night Syndicate (whom Joseph Vargo once provided cover artwork for), but overall Nox Arcana is more traditional in its approach to aural horror. Although it takes few chances musically, *Darklore Manor* is pervasively doom-laden and will add thick cobwebs to your crypt. Available from:

www.monolithgraphics.com.

RG ☠☠☠ 1/2



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Bring Out Your Living EP

TUESDAYS MUSIC

With ten minutes of soft piano, acoustic guitar and mechanical noise, London's Onethirtyeight offer evil ambience in the context of a soundtrack. Hungry zombies surround the title track, while The Crooked Song carries an eerie echo reminiscent of Chris Alexander's *Blood of Django* project and the final cut (Ourang-Outang) features a man making monkey noises. Soft

BURNT Instrumental Soundscapes

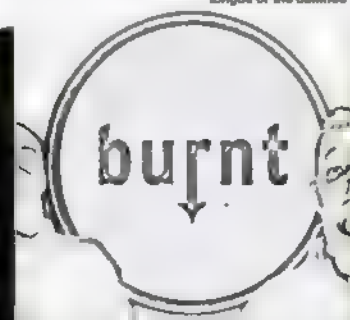
Tongue of the Damned

(INDEPENDENT)

A horror-coaster of ominous beats and fright pops, *Burnt* is a two-man trial in instrumental fear recalling the auditory highlights of modern fright cinema. Echoing those landmark

John Carpenter and Goblin soundtracks from the '70s, *Burnt* serve up the scares with a twist of giallo (*Revelations*) and eerie supernatural (*3:15 A.M.*). The standout, however, is *Zombie*, a tune that paints gruesome images of a half-rotten heart sprung to unnatural life via guitar smacks that suggest they are, in fact, coming to get you *Barbra*. Crafting ghastly atmospherics with man-made machines, this is the sound of homepun horror. www.burntmusic.com

TD ☠☠☠☠



tongue of the damned



RESIDENTS REMIXED

THE RESIDENTS

Warner Bros: RMX

The King & Eye: RMX

CRYPTIC CORP./EURO RALPH

Abetted by a German remix artist called Paralyzer, The Residents continue confusing the masses with two brand new, quite old recordings. Going waaaaay back into the well, they've remixed and

remastered the never released 1971 demo Warner Bros. album as well as their brilliant 1989 album of Elvis Presley covers *The King & Eye*. On *WB:RMX*, Paralyzer takes what sound like rudimentary snippets from the original demo and, employing superior digital technology, loops said snippets into slickly produced weird world-jazz and techno tunes. The Mad Sawmill Of Copenhagen opens the disc with discor-

dant trumpets, a mad violin and a sonorous vocal loop offering to "let me take you down." Baby Skeletons And Dogs bounces back and forth between freestyle jazz and rock/industrial while the deliciously glib Ohm Is Where The Art Is proves more than just a clever title with its saucy piano, vexed chanting and art-disco backbeat. It's hard to say how much remains here from the original recordings, but the overall effect is suitably twisted, certainly not intended for mass consumption. Emphasizing the pain and misery often overlooked in the lyrics of Presley's biggest hits, *The King & Eye: RMX* is a cautionary tale about a legendary performer whose death begat the ultimate American icon and a legion of aping impostors. An upbeat rock 'n' roll opus on the jeremiads of fame, the highest points include (but aren't confined to) Can't Help Falling In Love which sounds equally uplifting as it does heartbreaking and Burning Love which is tenderly malformed into a tale of flames upon flesh. Highly recommended for those who take a double dose of weird with their popular nostalgia. **TD**

Warner Bros: RMX ☠☠☠1/2

The King & Eye : RMX ☠☠☠☠

Punk/Experimental



and sedate, the three sequences on *Bring Out Your Living* don't really amount to much on their own, but if you're into arbitrary sounds of surrealist horror you can lock yourself away at www.onethirtyeight.co.uk. **TD** ☠☠☠



THE BIRTHDAY MASSACRE

Violet

(WWW.NOHINGANDNOWHERE.COM)

The reason Goth music consistently gets a bad rap is because it's degenerated into a tired formula that – like Bram Stoker's *Dracula* – just keeps getting rehashed by bands who aspire to little more than straight imitation. Enter The Birthday Massacre, probably the most original band working under the loose term "goth" while progressing the moniker into dreamy, nighttime places equal parts early Cure and edgy synth pop, buckling under obsessions with "emotion, memory, satire, horror, romance, fantasy, nostalgia and tragedy." On *Violet*, their second studio album, The Birthday Massacre flirts with colours both dark and sad, bringing malice to the wonderland of childhood trapped in an adult cage of broken dreams. Go to www.nothingandnowhere.com and follow the bloody rabbit. **RG** ☠☠☠☠



TIGER ARMY

Psychobilly

III: Ghost Tigers Rise

HELLCAT RECORDS

After last year's near fatal shooting of drummer Fred Hell, Tiger Army quickly made their comeback with some surprising new twists. Still dark and moody throughout, *Ghost Tigers Rise* is an incredibly mellow,

quiet and restrained album. You might say they've simply taken the psycho out of their 'billy, and admittedly some of this album suffers immensely from the lack of macabre energy that made earlier efforts so vital. On the other hand, when *Ghost Tigers Rise* departs the beaten path of punk and psychobilly it succeeds – the moonlit graveyard country of The Long Road and the Smiths-inspired Through The Darkness are standouts. All things considered, the third chapter in the quickly growing Tiger Army legacy sounds like a good transition piece for a band that's proving there's more to horror psychobilly than bass shredding and B-movies. **AL** ☠☠☠1/2



DR CHUD'S X-WARD

Punk

Diagnosis For Death

BLOODWORK RECORDS

After handling the drum kit for the Misfits during the classic *American Psycho/Famous Monsters* era, then forming the short-lived Graves with fellow Misfit Michael Graves, Dr. Chud completes his trilogy of terror with *Dr. Chud's X-Ward*, wherein he handles the vokill duties and is joined by a host of other notable horror punks and fiends. Luckily Chud resists the temptation to deliver a Misfits sound-alike band and instead crafts an original rockin' '80s metal-like slice of splatter pop. A comic book interpretation of the track Spiderbaby, and two fun, cheesy videos for Powerless and Mommy Made Love 2 An Alien mark *Diagnosis For Death* as a worthwhile collector's item. But there's more! Doc is also dealing copies of his early, pre-Misfits indie-punk-trash-metal outfit called Sacred Trash. The album is under-produced and sloppy as hell, but it is a chance to hear your favourite cannibalistic humanoid underground drummer's first stab at guitar and vocals. Fill your prescription at www.drchud.com. **AL** ☠☠☠☠

INDUSTRIAL-HORROR PIONEERS **SKINNY PUPPY** AWAKE FROM A TEN-YEAR SLUMBER WITH A NEW ALBUM, *THE GREATER WRONG OF THE RIGHT*, AND REAFFIRM THEIR POSITION AS THE MASTERS OF ELECTRONIC AURAL HORROR.



Synthetic Screams and Nightmares

by Chris Alexander

It's been nearly a decade since industrial pioneers Skinny Puppy took a supposed final bow with their controversial album *The Process*. In the wake of fellow member Dwayne Goettel's lethal heroin overdose, it seemed programmer cEVIN Key and vocalist Ogre's aural dog had had its day. Now, several side projects later, Key and Ogre have regrouped with the absolutely devastating *The Greater Wrong of the Right* from the Synthetic Symphony label.

With their savage blend of thick, penetrating beats, spastic sound layering, mutant use of samples, sound bites and harsh, treated vocals, Skinny Puppy have, through the span of over twenty years, had the uncanny ability to create aural horror films — nightmares translated to tape — redefining electronic music and almost single-handedly inventing the sub-genre of dance industrial. Not bad for a band whose entire aesthetic was built on sitting around watching B-grade horror shockers in smoke-filled rec rooms.

"We were founded on [horror]," Key confirms. "We used to stay up the whole weekend watching horror flicks and just getting samples and ideas. Of course, back then we had no idea about copyrights or whatever!"

The band has always relied on its dark cinematic leanings. Early *Guinea Pig* films were spliced into their live shows and the CD single for Worlock (from the album *Rabies*) even contained a full page anti-Jack Valenti (Chairman and CEO of the MPAA) rant that foresaw the death of the American horror film. Key himself seems to be the driving force behind the genre bent.

"I'm all about the E's," Key cavorts, "*Eraserhead*, *Evil Dead*, *The Exorcist* and *The Elephant Man*... *Eraserhead* is bar none my favourite film of all time, David Lynch, my favorite filmmaker. It's funny, I bought the DVD of *Eraserhead* off Lynch's site and watched the documentary on it about the movie, and I realized that the house where Lynch made that movie is just down the street from me! I mean how weird is that?!"

Picking up where *The Process* left off, *TGWOTR* is a leaner, meaner, cleaner Puppy; some fans will reject it for being less horror oriented but it's still littered with Key's signature electro layering and Ogre's faux UK tongue-twisting. It's a logical move, the maturation and

progression of a band that began the movement and opts to keep pushing the envelope.

Tracks like *I'mmortal* and *USEless* are high octane dancefloor tear-ups and *PRO-TEST* is perhaps one of the most intense compositions the band has ever unleashed. There are a few missteps (*Neuw-erld* is pretty tough to take) but on the whole this disc is fucking rabid. Clean, sober and with a richer outlook on life, the band is currently embarked on a world tour, but Key admits that some of his addictions have been harder to

kick than others, namely, horror movies.

"I was surprised how much I dug *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* remake," he says. "I love the original and the remake was just as good, I wasn't expecting much and it totally blew me away — so brutal!"

With the traumas of yesterday a distant dream, cEVIN Key is thinking positive, in top form and ready to face the future. Make no mistake, Key and Ogre are back, ready to please the old fans, win some new ones and continue reshaping the razor-slashed face of dark electronic music.



THE ROUTE 66 KILLERS

Murder On Beaver Street

GRAVEWAX RECORDS

You would think any horror surf album would be necessarily campy, but not so on The Route 66 Killers' *Murder On Beaver Street*, a decidedly dark and creepy collection of melodic reverb-laden instrumental tunes. Made up of three faux Russian escaped murderers, The Route 66 Killers demonize the sounds of Dick Dale and add a spaghetti western vibe for that extra effect. Although instrumental, the song titles on this album are telling enough: *Ballad Of The Headless Horseman*, *Shallow Grave*, *The Devil's Martini* – something tells me this ain't your grandparents' surf music. Plus, you have to admire any band that can write a beach party ode to *The Masque of the Red Death*. Even if the Route 66 Killers don't take themselves too seriously, *Murder On Beaver Street* is as spine-chillingly demented as a surf album gets. **AL** ☠☠☠☠

Surf



WEIRD FICTION HORROR COMPILATION

Various

VALIANT DEATH RECORDS

Penis Flytrap, Cancerslug, Eerie Ln. – the back of this CD reads like an Audio Drome horror punk Hall of Maim. 25 tracks in total spanning a variety of punk sub-genres, from the Satanic sleaze rock of Sweden's Sex Sex Sex to the stylized black leather vamp punk of Canada's Mr. Underhill, *Weird Fiction* is the best overview of the worldwide underground horror punk scene to land in my bloody palms. Our only word of warning: many of these recordings are just a notch above basement demo quality, but if that doesn't turn you off, turn yourself on with this creepy casket of schlock 'n' roll. **AL** ☠☠☠☠1/2

Punk



BURNING IMAGE 1983-1987

Goth Punk

ALTERNATIVE TENTACLES

At some point in the early '80s, right around the time the Misfits were calling it quits, an obscure band called Burning Image from the California bible belt innovatively combined punk, goth and hardcore, released one 7-inch, played a series of shows with the Dead Kennedys, then mysteriously disappeared. Now collectors can treat themselves to this compilation of the entire Burning Image catalogue, including early recordings, demo tracks, and three new songs. The appeal that Burning Image would have held back in the day is unmistakable. Their sound is wonderfully twisted and weird, but there is also a definite lack of energy and, quite frankly, they have little "repeat listening" value. But still, we recommend this to anyone who worships at the alter of the early goth sounds of Christian Death, Sex Gang Children and TSOL. **AL** ☠☠☠1/2



THE HANGMEN

Spring Heeled Jack

OBLIVION STUDIOS

They've been described as Motorhead vs. The Stray Cats after an all-night horror movie marathon, a fitting sketch of a band fueled by the maniacal fury of old school psychobilly and punk rawk. On this 7-inch pressed on blood red vinyl, The Hangmen pay tribute to the mythical UK monster Spring Heeled Jack, and back it up with other tales of senseless violence including two live tracks (*Dancing On Your Grave*, *Teenage Suicide*). Eternal damnation's gonna be long, but at least with The Hangmen, hell's sure to be one rockin' joint.

AL ☠☠☠☠

Punk

latest, *Make It Bleed* – a monstrous album of Ramones rock, Mötley Crüe posturing and old school Alice Cooper theatrics. Each song is introduced with a clip from a classic chiller, and from the massive Ace Frehley riff-rocking of Planet Graveyard to the bittersweet melodic pop punk of Cobwebs, *Make It Bleed* is as much fun as *Devil's Night* was in high school.

AL ☠☠☠☠1/2



THEE MERRY WIDOWS

Psychobilly

Thee Merry Widows EP

(INDEPENDENT)

Lead by busty burlesque queen Miss Eva von Slut (picture Anna Nicole Smith plastered with flaming Elvis Presley tattoos), Thee Merry Widows are five fetished-up femmes from Northern California with a taste for hot cars and surf guitars. Featuring four Crampsy cuts like the smoothly harmonized *Cruel Mistress* and *Grave Robbers From Outer Space* (complete with Theremin solo) this one's got some moxie, but the vocals often get buried or sound a little held back. But get this; we hear Miss Slut plays said Theremin solo... with her boobs! www.deadgirl13.com

TD ☠☠☠



BLOODSUCKING ZOMBIES FROM OUTER SPACE

Punk

See You At Disneyland

FIEND FORCE RECORDS

Our horror punk friends at Fiend Force Records keep putting them out; their latest signing is Austria's premiere (and likely only) horror punk, psychobilly band. These undead extraterrestrials' debut is pure monster mash party punk, ranging from upbeat power pop to bass shredding rockabilly, and stalk 'n' slash ska (there's even one techno track). Not surprisingly the Bloodsucking Zombies' message lies in an addiction to horror movie fandom and obsessions with Satanism, serial killers and naughty nuns. Although they could be faulted for trying too many genres on



DBY

Make It Bleed

JMB RECORDS

South Florida's punk rock morticians DBY (Death Becomes You) pay tribute to everything that's cool in horror and rock 'n' roll on their

Punk



THE VIDEO DEAD

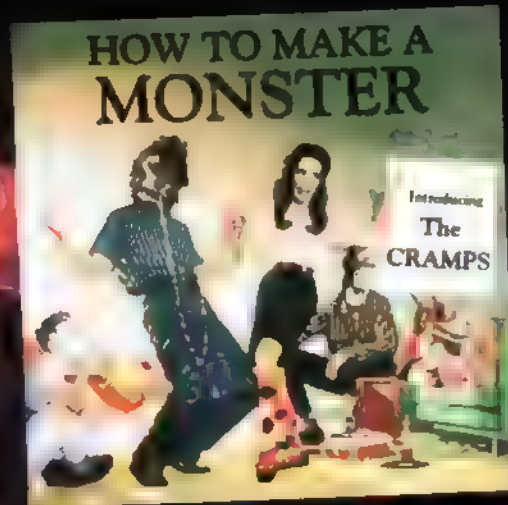
The S/T EP

DEATH OR GLORY RECORDS

Named after 1987's forgotten low-budget zombie yawner (in which the undead inhabit a haunted TV set), Toronto's Video Dead have been catching attention recently by touring the Great White North in

Punk

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THE LURKING CORPSES Punk/Metal

23 Tales of Terror

CREATURE FEATURE PRODUCTIONS

Now this is more like it! The Lurking Corpses stalk and slash the listener's senses with classic Misfits ghoulish punk and old school trash metal, loaded with cheesy but nasty lyrics about horror movies, monsters and loving the dead. While the music is hardly progressive, the Corpses show they ain't afraid to mix up their styles and put their own stamp on heavy music. Loaded with odes to psychos, zombies and Satan himself, *23 Tales of Terror* brings back welcome memories of a youth mispent on punk rock, skateboarding and monster magazines. **AL** ☠☠☠☠



support of our country's kings of lowbrow punk, The Dayglo Abortions. A good old-fashioned hardcore album with metallic details à la Maiden and Pantera, the *S/T* EP features six slickly produced tracks including *Paradise Lost*, a killer punk hardcore cut that reminds us a little of Balzac in that it finds a way to retain a sense of melody amidst bilious vocals and hammer-down drumming. Best album cover I've seen in a while **TD** ☠☠☠



THE VILLIANS Punk

Run For Your Lives

CLOSED COFFIN RECORDS

As visually frightening as a purse-dog in a homemade Halloween hat, Pennsylvania's The Villians (sic) appear to consist of a skinny witch, an East Indian zombie, a guy posing for a Sears catalogue, and some dude in Dockers holding a tiny beer bottle. Half expecting *Weird Al* meets Slipknot, this one's actually played straight, featuring nine tracks of creep-o power metal, sloppy punk licks, "Kong at the Gates" power intros and the odd scream-along song with lyrics like "It's raining/It's pouring/The blood and guts are falling!" Under-

produced and in need of a serious makeover, but what the hell, it's honest, and tosses some love at the genre (*Silent Violent Night*, *Jersey Devil*, *Texas Chainsaw*) so I guess it's ultimately alright by me. www.villians.cjb.net. **TD** ☠☠1/2



THE RABIES Punk

Get Infected!!!

(WWW.THERABIES.COM)

A crass concoction of B-movies, drugs, violence, and anarchic attitude, The Rabies are a throwback to the heyday of DIY punk rock which, of course, means the majority of listeners will be put off by their rough, trashy sound and total disregard to legitimate production values. Legend has it, *Get Infected!!!* was recorded in the attic of a haunted house in upstate NY and, if the legend is true, the band would be right at home given stage names like Blair Bitch and Dr. Sik, and songs to the tune of *Psycho*, *Teenage Mutant Massacre*, *Freddy (I Love You)*, and *Whiplash Love*. Politics might make up a big part of their lyrics, but The Rabies are horror fiends at their core, and given a few technological upgrades in their sound, they have what it takes to win over the black heart of any horror punk fanatic. **AL** ☠☠☠1/2



SEND MORE PARAMEDICS Hardcore

The Hallowed and The Heathen

IN AT THE DEEP END RECORDS

They're baaack! Those wonderful zombie makeup wearing, hardcore crossover punk playing, flesh-eating lads from the UK return with *The Hallowed and The Heathen*, another tribute to the living, rotting dead – picking up where *A Feast For the Fallen* (RM#36) left us hanging. This time, we're treated to tales of black magic voodoo zombies (Bokor), radiation fallout zombies (Half Life), and unethical-medical-experiments-gone-zombie (Cranial Blowout). Send More Paramedics stick to their formula – Bay Area thrash crossed with '80s hardcore punk, freshly unearthing and reanimating both genres. A meaty morsel not to miss!

AL ☠☠☠☠



ATREYU Hardcore

The Curse

VICTORY RECORDS

Somewhere along the way, the hardcore heroes in Atreyu must have started watching a lot of Ingrid Pitt flicks or reading Anne Rice, as the gothic vampirism that was only hinted at on their 2002 debut is expanded fully on *The Curse*. There's the sexy vamp artwork, then there's song titles like *Blood Children* and *This Flesh A Tomb* – hell, they're even running contests for a Vampire Tour in New Orleans. Unfortunately, the same success that will see Atreyu land dates on this year's Ozzfest has lead to a shift in their musical phi-

losophy; their trademark innovative hardcore has been replaced by a glossed-over, nu-metal sound à la Drowning Pool and POD, which not only sounds cheap, but is wholly inappropriate for the band's neo-vamp aesthetic as well. **AL** ☠☠



GRAVEDIGGAZ Hip Hop

6 Feet Deep

X-RAY

Back in the early '90s, Gravediggaz introduced the world to what is now known as horrorcore hip hop, filling their lyrics with brutal splatter gore in an exaggeration of the gritty violence now typical of gangsta rap. A decade after their debut, surviving member Frukwan (a.k.a. The Gatekeeper) resurrects the band in a tribute to his late fiend and group member Poetic. Though the album does at times boast a dark vibe over its steady funk and hip hop beats, one can't help but notice Frukwan's lyrics don't stray far from your standard tales of urban street life hardships. This is likely because *6 Feet Deep* is reportedly nothing more than a repackaged copy of Frukwan's solo album *Life*, released last year, with the song titles changed and rearranged. It's still a solid album (the catchy, creepy *Big Shot Dead* stands out), but if you're a hip hop regular, buyer beware. **AL** ☠☠



STRANGE BOUTIQUE Alternative

The Collection: 1988-1994

METROPOLIS RECORDS

If the girls from Switchblade Symphony hooked up with the guys from The Cure at an all-night orgy

W.A.S.P.

THE NEON GOD: part 1 - The Rise

PART 1
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"Oh Tell Me Lord, Why Am I Here?"

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DAVE DILLVIE IDONT HEZHO KATIE B. ANTHONY "M" VALCIC SONS OF FREEDOM BADES IN TORNADO
MONSTER MAGNET SLASH S.F.S. PHIL WESTERN TONY MACHAYRE TUDM D'ARCY



and gave collective birth to a band/child, they probably would have named it Strange Boutique. Featuring Monica Richards (Faith and the Muse) on vocals, the band's goth-around-the-edges sound is complimented by flangey guitars, soft bass lines and lyrics that flicker with ghostly mystique. *The Collection* features cuts from every Strange Boutique release plus a few rarities including a breathy cover of David Bowie's *Heroes* and the superior *We Treat The Blindness*, the sort of siren song you find yourself floating away upon before you realize you may not care if you ever float back. **TD** ☠☠☠



VELVET ACID CHRIST Industrial

Between The Eyes Volume Two
METROPOLIS

On *Between the Eyes Volume Two*, the one-man project known as Velvet Acid Christ gives listeners the chance to delve deep into this industrial institution's back catalogue of B-sides and rarities. According to the liner notes, the album showcases VAC's "goth" side, with heavy influences by the likes of The Cure and The Legendary Pink Dots. I can't deny the accuracy of those comparisons, but Robert Smith never wrote songs called *Serial Killer 101*, *Hail To The Dead Souls* or *I'm Gonna Wrap Myself In Your Intestines*. Highly recommended by the Drome, *Between the Eyes Volume 2* is beautifully dark, atmospheric and decidedly spooky. **AL** ☠☠☠☠1/2



130 RUE MORGUE



DIE HAUT AND NICK CAVE

Burnin' the Ice

HIT THING

In the early '80s, Berlin's Die Haut (The Skin) were considered front-runners to a rapidly expanding post-punk Industrial scene colonized by fellow countrymen Einstürzende Neubauten. After some twenty years out of print, this heretofore lost artifact boasts distressed vocals from a post-Birthday Party, pre-Bad Seeds Nick Cave backed by dual atonal guitars and stunted bass lines which suggest the bottomed-out feeling of nuclear winter. A Euro misery disc/noise rock precursor that's perhaps more important historically than sonically but packaged to please and no doubt a godsend to Cave completists. The limited edition digi-pack comes with a DVD featuring Die Haut footage on their first tour supporting the Birthday Party in '82, full lyrics and a glossy 24-page booklet with pics and detailed Die Haut history. **TD** ☠☠☠



DESTROY ALL DJs

Various

CLEOPATRA RECORDS
74 genre-bending minutes compiled by two Los Angeles table-jockeys, BP and Efficie, *Destroy All DJs* picks scraps from the past six decades of popular music and crams 'em together into a non-stop, heavily corrupted mix CD. While not as dark or spooky as our typical Drome fare, you might be interested in hearing how Razed In Black fare against Bow Wow Wow, The Prodigy Vs. Screamin' Jay Hawkins or Louis Armstrong and

Industrial

Electroclash

Rosetta Stone gettin' together on NIN's *Closer*. A good balance of cool (Stooges, Runaways, Pitbull Day-care) and kitsch (Archies, Shangri-Las, the Droyds), the mash-up also features shrewdly swindled artwork and rapper KRS-One freestyling about US race relations to the tune of Kim Carnes' *Betty Davis Eyes*. With some 37 artists accounted for, this schizophrenic hullabaloo is the kind of novelty you'll likely love on first listen then immediately forget. Wait, what was I talking about again? **TD** ☠☠



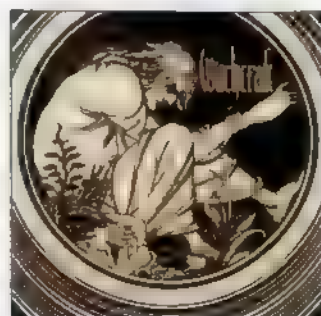
MIGUEL AND THE LIVING DEAD

Miguel and the Living Dead

(WWW.MIGUELDEAD.COM)

A rare horror/death rock band from Poland, Miguel And The Living Dead are what all those English '80s goth bands would sound like if they had spent more time watching horror movies and less time moaning about being depressed. As the old cliché goes, these misanthropes defy comparisons, with a sound that is based on the driving beats of old school punk and blanketed with new wave keyboard effects for thick, grainy atmosphere and plenty of dark creativity. Their name is likely a nod to the doomed soldier character in Romero's *Day of the Dead*, and with song titles like *Salem's Lot* and *The Night Of Terror*, Miguel And The Living Dead confirm inspiration from the genre. **AL** ☠☠☠☠1/2

Death Rock



WITCHCRAFT

Witchcraft

RISE ABOVE RECORDS
Everyone knows Black Sabbath wrote the bible on dark rock, and

Dark Rock

apparently the Swedish rockers in Witchcraft know it too. The doomy stoner riffs that fill their self-titled debut serve as a refresher course on the classic devil worshipping Gypsy blues of Ozzy, Iommi, Ward, and Butler. Recorded through vintage equipment, this album is so '60s you can practically smell the weed burning through your speakers. What's cool about it though, is the way they use influences like Jethro Tull and Led Zeppelin while retaining an undeniably pitch dark vibe. Not original at all mind you, but Witchcraft's music could easily pass as the mystery "lost" Sabbath album that should have been released sometime between *Paranoid* and *Master of Reality*. **AL** ☠☠☠



GODHEAD

Non-Stop Ride

CLEOPATRA RECORDS

You might know Godhead as the first band Marilyn Manson signed to his Posthuman record label a few years back but, buyer beware; *Non-Stop Ride* is actually a mix compiled by frontman Jason Miller and (ex-Nitzer Ebb) Julian Beeston, and why it carries the Godhead name is beyond me. A monster mash-up of darkwave and not-so underground industrial from the past (Ogre, Pigface, The Damned) and present (Haujobb, Razed In Black, VNV Nation), *Non-Stop Ride* speeds along at an even keel and all of the bands sound good against each other, but with its ominous cyber-gloom design, repetitive penchant and humdrum cover tunes (when will the damn Bela Lugosi's Dead covers kack-off already?), this one's riding in style over substance all the way. **TD** ☠☠☠

Industrial
Darkwave

AUDIO DROME

RESIDENT EVIL: Apocalypse

IN THEATRES SEPTEMBER 10TH

THE SOUNDTRACK TO THE APOCALYPSE

FEATURING NEW MUSIC FROM

A PERFECT CIRCLE

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THE DEFTONES

ROB ZOMBIE

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PLAY DEAD



GRAPHICS



PLAYABILITY



SHIVERS

GAMES REVIEWED BY ANDREW LEE

HIGHEST RATING IS THREE

ATMOSFEAR

Pressman Toy Corp.
DVD Board Game

Remember that shitty VHS board game from about ten years ago called *Nightmare* where you played along in real time with a goofy character on a poorly produced videotape? Well just like Jason Voorhees and Leatherface, the Gatekeeper recently got an upgrade to DVD.

While playing *Atmosfear*, players must collect six keys, avoid traps and battle each other as they manoeuvre their way to the centre of the board where they must face their greatest fear in order to win. On their way, they're hounded and heckled by the Gatekeeper playing out on the television and must answer to his every sadistic whim before time runs out. Players only have 49 minutes to face their fears or the Gatekeeper wins and banishes them to a grisly torment in the nether regions of Hell.

For a game suitable for ages twelve and up, *Atmosfear* is actually a surprisingly fun, fast-paced romp, and the random programming on the DVD means that you will never play the same game twice. And, unlike Jason and Leatherface, this makes the perfect wedding gift.

THE HAUNTING HOUSE

Twilight Creations
Board Game

This ain't your little sister's dollhouse, buddy. This is that creepy abandoned house at the end of the street – you know, the last one on the left – that you dared your friends to go into. But now you're trapped inside and all you've got is your bravery, your wits and your uncanny ability to dick-over your friends and get the fuck out before they do.

The ghouls at Twilight Creations have scared up this little spook of a game that combines strategy with random chance as you find the walls and halls of the house changing around you. Two to six players use cards and tiles to try to navigate through trapdoors and secret passages to an exit that keeps moving just out of reach in this action-packed board game best played with more than two people. By the end of it you'll know who your true friends really are.

McFARLANE'S EVIL PROPHECY

Konami
PS2

Let me start by saying: Todd McFarlane, I love you, but man, I hate your game. The same guy who revolutionized the action figure industry and set comics on a new track has unfortunately failed in the games department and *Evil Prophecy* is the name of that failure. Based on the McFarlane's Monsters toy line, *Evil Prophecy* had a promising future by teaming up with the good people at Konami, who rocked the world with the *Silent Hill* series.

Being able to duke it out with monsters like Dracula, Frankenstein and the Mummy while cycling through the characters of a pirate, shaman, scientist and gunslinger (each with specialized fighting abilities) in a game slightly reminiscent of *Gauntlet* sounded kinda cool. So what went wrong?

Not only does *Evil Prophecy* have the look and feel of an early PS1 game, it actually has the sound and taste of one as well. The graphics are mediocre at best, gameplay is repetitive, easy and boring, and there is no voiced dialogue or kick-ass music score. Honestly, *Evil Prophecy* left such a bad taste in my mouth, that I had to drink a whole bottle of Listerine and watch internet porn for the rest of the night just to get back all of the brain cells I lost playing it. On the upside, I found out that the disc also conveniently doubles as a coaster.



COMING SOON

MONSTER HUNTER

Team up with three of your buddies on line and try to poach some scary-ass dinosaurs. Hunt or be hunted. (PS2)

THE WARRIORS

Rockstar Games gives the cult gang movie from the '70s its own action game complete with beatniks, hippies and groovy hairdos. (PS2)

THE HOUSE OF

Being dead can be a little boring, so how about a little windup race around the cemetery? Fasten seat belts, the game wins! (Board Game)

DOE OF EGYPTIAN

DARK CORNERS OF THE EARTH

H.P. Lovecraft's celebrated works of literature are brought to life in this upcoming action-adventure game. (XBOX) PC

WHEN BADNESS COMES

THIS IS NOT HAPPENING

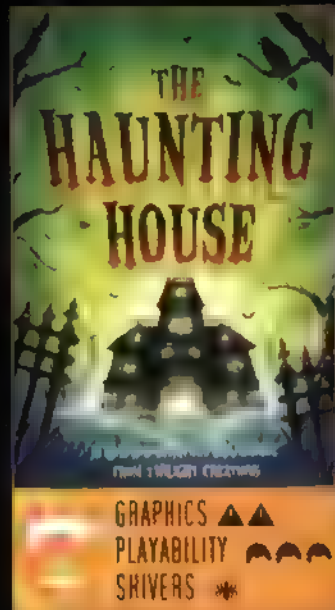
An expansion to the *When Badness Comes* board game series, this game asks the question: what would happen if the monsters you thought to be real were actually someone else's imagination? (REG/Board Game)

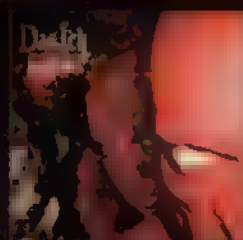
BLACK HILL: LIGHTS OUT

In this sequel, the town of Newtarian is cast into eerie darkness and you must uncover its sinister secrets. (PC)

BUFFY: WELCOME TO SUNNYDALE

A sourcebook packed with enough maps, locations and descriptions to help you create new characters and find out where Spike gets his hair bleached. (RPG; Sourcebook)





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Das Ich Tera - classical orchestration mingled with dark sinister electronics and growling vocals includes a Wumpost remix. **Grand Prescription/Medicine** - dark and sometimes morbid; exposes the hypocrisy of government and religion through the use of various samples, orchestral sounds and layers of electronic beats.

I Am Dark Angel - haunting female vocals, harpsichords, and organs with chilling antique and sacred elements over throbbing electronic beats; explores a forgotten world and introduced it to the darker side of electronic music.

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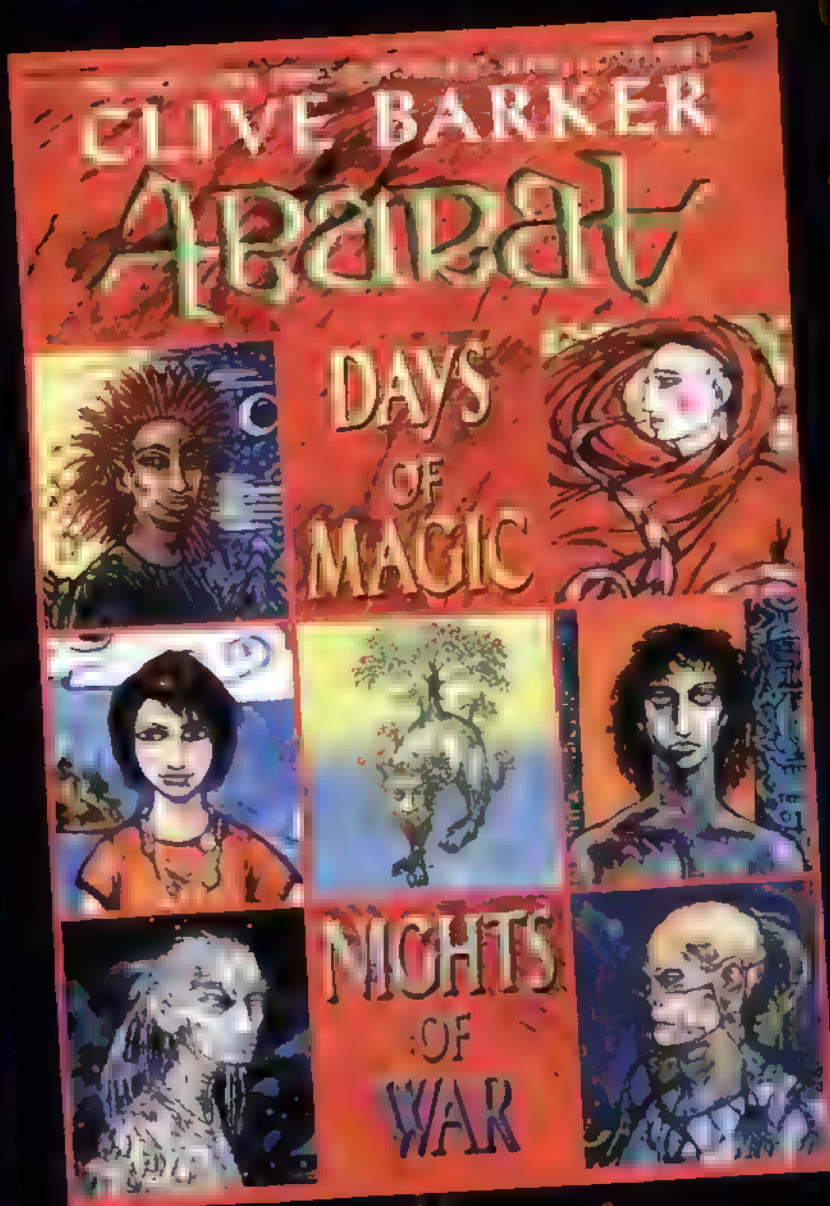


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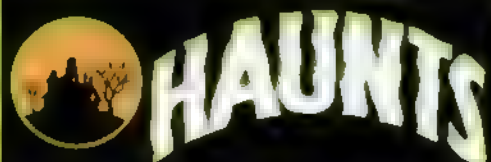
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Classic Cut

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RAFT OF THE MEDUSA



France - 1819
by Théodore Géricault
Oil on canvas; 491 X 716 cm
Musée du Louvre, Paris

It's not often that the opportunity comes along to simply celebrate. To say: here are some things that made a difference in my life when I first encountered them and, in fact, are still making a difference, touchstones of power and feeling which I return to over and over again, especially when my creative batteries are running low. I'd love to make a list of such touchstones that was 100 items long. But I don't have much room, so I'm limiting myself to one: a painting.

In my late teens I went with a group of friends to taste a little of old-fashioned bohemian living in Paris. We saw all the usual sights, with a heavier emphasis on cemeteries, perhaps, than the ordinary itinerary would contain. One of the places we visited, of course, was the Louvre. After a few hours I'd had a surfeit of paintings, and was ready to leave. Then I turned a corner and stepped into the presence of a work that has haunted my imagination ever since. It's called *Raft of the Medusa*, created in 1819 by French Romanticist painter and lithographer Théodore Géricault.

The painting depicts a scandalous event in French history that I knew nothing of at the time, of course. The *Medusa* was a government vessel which had foundered off the West African coast in 1816, laden with Algerian immigrants, 150 of whom tried to escape on a raft. Thirteen days later, only fifteen people were rescued alive, having sustained themselves on nothing save a few drops of wine and... human meat.

But it was the sheer presence of the painting, which overwhelmed. The *Raft of the Medusa* is huge, and painted with such meticulous realism that you can practically smell the stench of death off it. This is no surprise given that, in his manic pursuit of verisimilitude, Géricault had the heads of guillotined men brought to his studio and painted them as they slowly rotted in front of him.

Géricault apparently didn't care about the smell, it was all part of the work he had to do, but his neighbours eventually complained, and finally he was obliged to have the decomposing heads removed. These studios of dead men still exist by the way; they're more disturbing, in their casual beauty, than a hundred horror movies.

As for *The Raft of the Medusa* itself, its size and grandeur remain awe-inspiring. The raft tilts towards us as the dark seas roll around it. Some of the men on the raft are dead, others despairing or crazed. Overhead the sky is slate-grey and sickly yellow. This is not a world of miracles and redemption; Géricault shows us our lives are as fragile as the lives of these poor souls. Despair with them, because this is real.

Raft of the Medusa is the work of a young visionary who will never again have the opportunity to make his mark on the world. Soon after completing the vast canvas, Géricault died at the age of 33 in a fall from a horse. If you have a taste for the heroically macabre, then find a great big reproduction of this picture, or better still, go see it in the flesh, so to speak. It's worth the trip.

One then, as promised. It's not, I grant you, a conventional choice. No Mario Bava flicks, no early Cronenberg. But the stuff of fear can be all the more powerful if it's discovered in an unlikely setting. Nor do you need to go looking too hard. It's everywhere. People like the grim stuff, however much they may protest that they don't. As I said once in a story from the *Books of Blood*: "There's no delight the equal of dread."

It's truer than I thought.

Clive Barker



Raft of the Medusa: Géricault's haunting portrait of despair.

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April 20, 1999:

-dispatch(12:10): What is the nature of the emergency?
-unidentified female(12:11): They've got guns.
They wanna kill us.

-dispatch(12:11): Could you repeat that, please? Hello?

Ringwood Pair Are Charged After Columbine Spoof Film

Herald & News
RINGWOOD — In a bizarre twist that involves a home-made movie and two alleged shotguns, two borough men were arrested Wednesday and charged with possession of a firearm on school property, police said.

marketing on the Internet. Police said the film, "Duck! The Carbine High Massacre," was shot on location at E.O. Hewitt School on Floatsbury Road in August. The school is for fourth- and fifth-graders. They said that the film was a harmless artistic statement intended to lampoon the media's excesses in covering school shootings.

Allegedly used guns on school grounds

Filmmakers Arrested For Columbine Spoof

RINGWOOD, N.J. — Two filmmakers who produced a takeoff based on the Columbine High School shootings have been arrested for using real weapons while filming part of the

"What can I say about this? It's like a really bad traffic accident -- you're horrified and disgusted, but you can't look away. **Duck! The Carbine High Massacre** takes one of the most controversial American tragedies in recent memory and turns it into a tasteless and offensive satire that's already outraged a number of people."

THE STORY UNFOLDS ON OCTOBER 12, 2004

DUCK!

The Carbine High Massacre

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